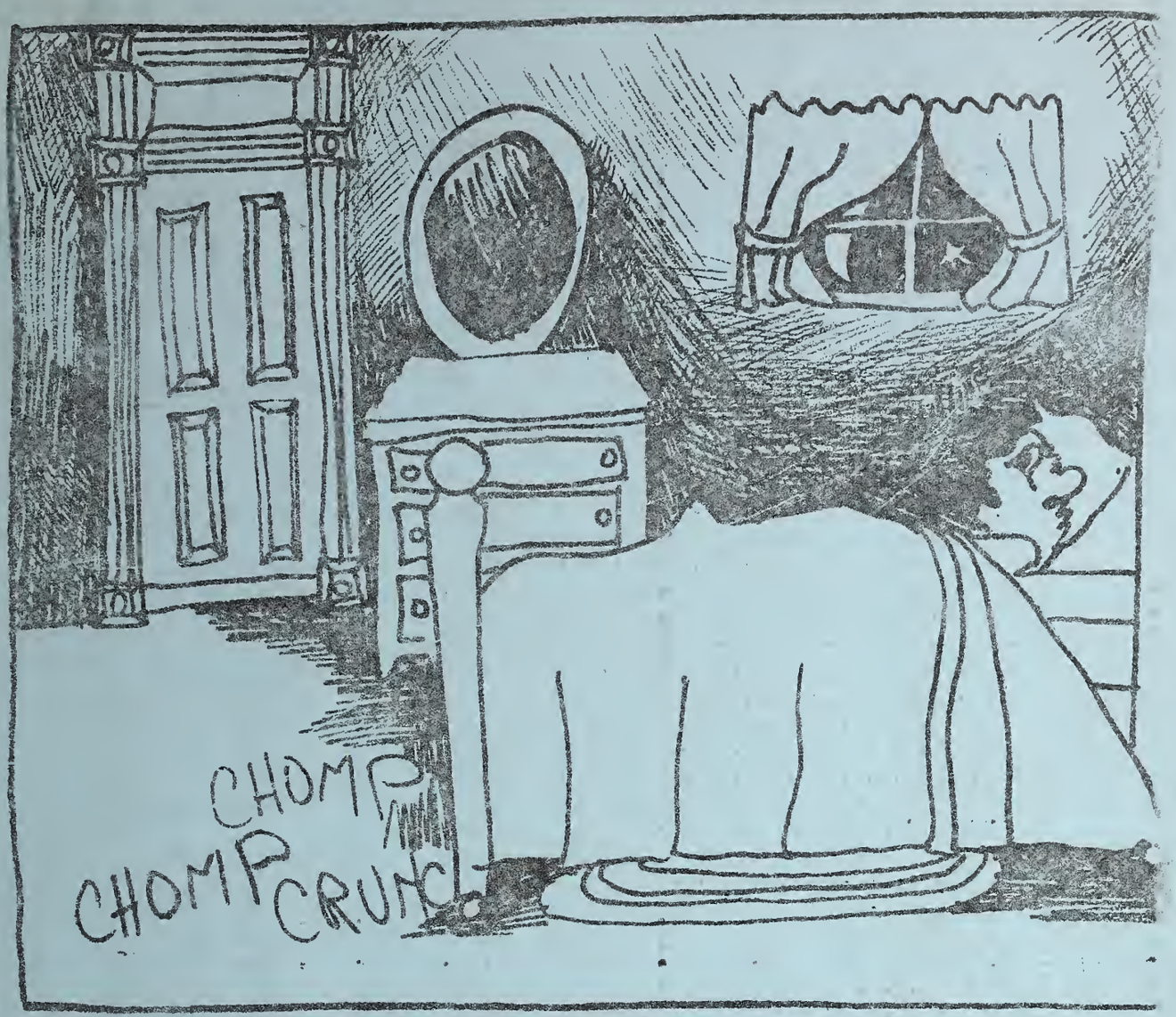
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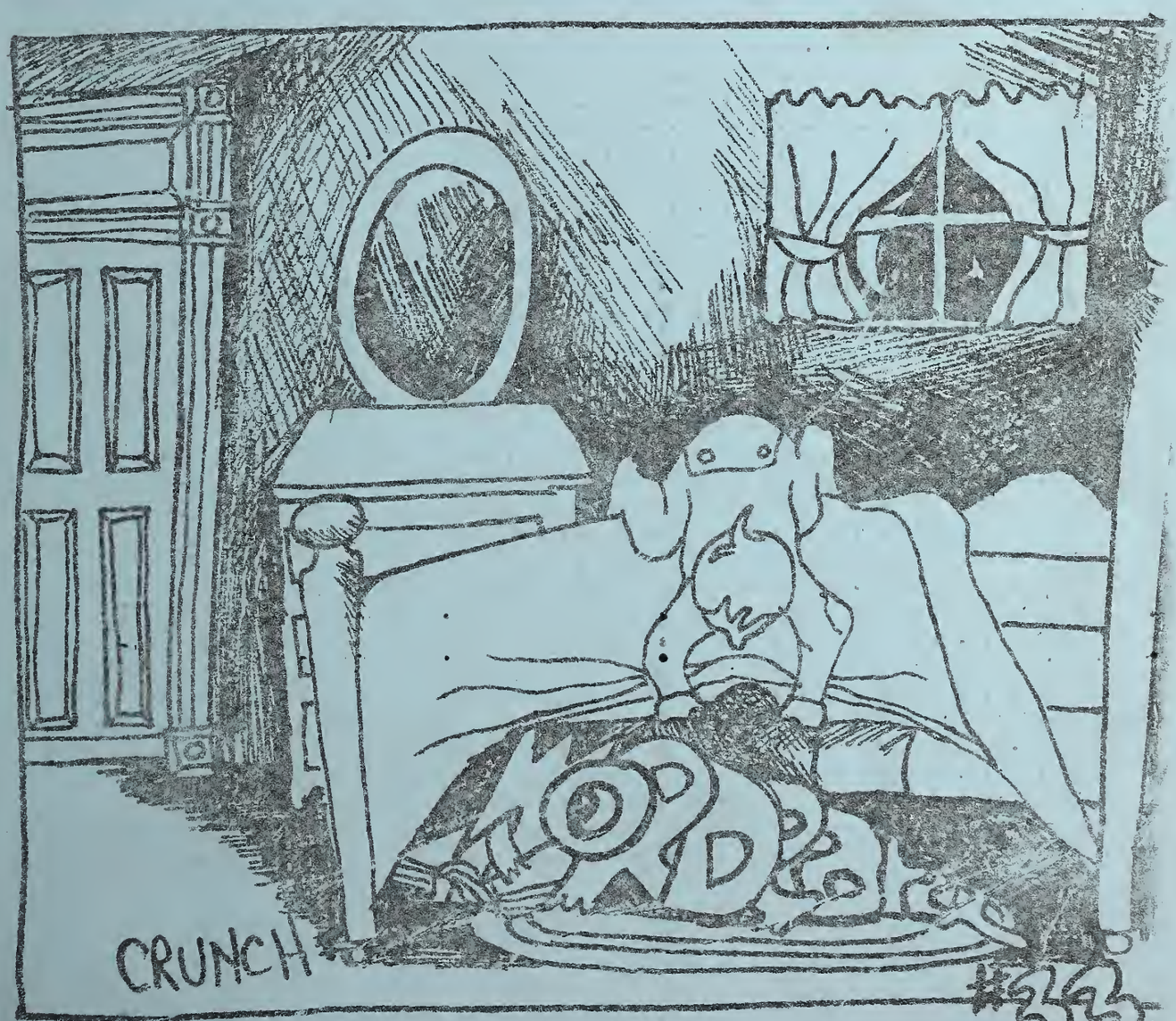
CRUNCH

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THE PLOT

BROTHER, MY BROTHER
WHERE ARE YOU GROWING TO?
A VISION IS SO EASY TO OVERLOOK,
MAYBE I CAN MEET YOU THERE.
HAVE YOU SEEN THE DRAGONS?
DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THE DRAGONS?
AT THE EDGES OF THE MAP,
IN THE LOCKED GLOVE COMPARTMENT
AT THE BACK OF YOUR BRAIN.
FINGERPRINTS ARE A-OK.
WHAT ABOUT THE DRAGONS?
HAVE YOU SEEN THE DRAGONS,
THE DEMONS,
THE THINGS YOU WON'T DESCRIBE?
ON THE WEST SIDE
ON THE EAST SIDE
DID YOU LOOK INTO THEIR EYES?
YOU SHIVERED, YOU SHAKED
(THEIR ROARED FRESH HOT FIRES)
YOU QUIVERED, YOU QUAKED
(THEIR REPTILIAN CLEAN DESIRE)
JUST LAY BACK JUST LAY BACK
AND LET THEM FEEL YOUR BRAIN
DO YOU THINK THEY'D HARM YOU?
JUST MOVEMENT AND CHANGE
THE WORLD IS FLAT, SO SAIL WITH ME
AND PLAY THE DRAGON GAME
JUST A COUPLE MORE
JUST A COUPLE MORE HILLS TO CLIMB
HILLS TO CLIMB IN YOUR MIND
I KNOW YOU CAN CARRY
A SECRET OR TWO.
CAN YOU TAKE IT WITH YOU?
YES, YOU CAN.
TIME TO PLAY TIME TO PLAY
TIME TO PLAY THE DRAGON GAME
OPEN UP OPEN UP
OPEN UP THE DRAGON'S DOOR
YES, YOU CAN.
MAYBE I CAN GREET YOU THERE.

MICHAEL A. STILLMAN

THE SUB-PLOT

CLIMB ABOARD THE SCALES.
YOU AINT SO HEAVY,
YOU'RE FROM THE SAME
LITTER AS ME.

NONCONFORITY
NUCOMETY
NCFMY
OOOLY
NONCOM
NONCONFORMITY
IS
A
DRAGON'S
PLAYGROUND.

POLICE ORDER
ALL DRAGONS
ARE TO BE
ARRESTED
ON SIGHT.

FLAME-SWALLOWING PUNISHABLE BY LAW. DECL. 33481.6 DRAGON BUREAU

WHAT HAVE THE RULE-THROWERS DONE?
PLUNDERED AND RAVAGED
BAM RIP BAM
MAN TO MAN.

CUPS ARE OKAY FOR LIZARDS

THE BLOATED
AND GREEDY
SERVANTS HAVE
SURREPTITIOUSLY
AND SECURELY
BOUND THEIR
MASTERS.

CALL IT A CLUB—
SNEER IF YOU WILL
CALL IT A CLIQUE—
POINT YOUR SOAPY FINGER
CALL IT A SECRET SOCIETY—
BUT LUCKY LEIF AND COLUMBUS
SAW THEIR LIBERTY,
EDISON AND EINSTEIN
CARRIED CARDS LOCALLY,
I KNOW SOCRATES AND PLATO
AND LITTLE JACK HORNER
REGULARLY

CHEAP VERSE

ALL I WANT IS
FREEDOM, A GOOD
BOOK, AND A BACKYARD
FULL OF DRAGONS.

BUT A DRAGON NEEDS A BOWL

ALCHEMISTS AND
DIVINISTS
SLEEP CAREFULLY!!

Judy Belfield

Even If You Do Have the Money, Honey . . .

I have no time to spend on you today.
I've searched my empty pockets through and through
And cannot find a minute there for you.
Like lots of pennies lost along the way,
Grabbed up by strangers, stashed without delay,
The seconds dropped from holes too large and few
In secret places, worn, no longer new:
They're gone forever, now I cannot pay
The debt to you; I cannot pay, I say!
No time, too bad, no time, no time for you,
No dime, no nickel, Lincoln-head or two.
I've spent or lost it all in foolish play,
Like wasting it by writing verse this way --
And I've no time to spend on you today.

*****

Laura Lauth

Card XVIII: LaLune

The ribbons in his hat are:
A. Yellow
B. Blue
C. Everything looks grey in the moonlight
She is standing on:
A. a balcony
B. her honor
The Lute player's dog is:
A. asleep
B. merely dozing
Can you find a crayfish in this picture?

*****

Janet Valek

Screw Conformity

Conformity prevents creativity
Conformity prevents flexibility
Therefore insight does not come about.
Conformity enforces rigidity
Rigid as a nice, symmetrical cube.
Why does everything have to be so neat,
Everything in its proper place?
Why does one have to follow in order
in the nice, good, exact way
One after another
Bing
Bing
Bing
Around
Around
Around.
Let one be messy, unconventional
Let one alone.
Let one go his own way.

*****

Judy Belfield

Stop Or I'll Shoe

"I'm looking for the shoes of the fictionman," I said.

"These boots are made for writing," said the salesclerk pointing to a display. "Very Hemingway . . . good on safaris. Or how about these government issues -- sort of Norman Maileresque?"

"Too heavy," I said.

"Then the Zane Greys are out too, I guess?"

"Yeah, too confining. What kind of sandals do you have?"

"Well, now, let's see," he said. "We have the increasingly popular Bible style."

"Too airy."

"We have the Roman variety, ala Caesar."

"I don't speak Latin."

"There are these strappy Jacqueline Suzannes . . ."

"Too flimsy."

"And here are some Jerry Rubins."

"Out-moded."

"What about slippers," he asked. "We have some lovely Cinderella Glass . . ."

"I'm too old."

"And L. Frank Baum Rubies . . ."

"Too flashy."

"Well, there's the Sherlock Holmes zippered slipper . . ."

"I'm not into drugs."

"And the W. Clement Moore pair -- good for slipping into when you hear noises on the roof."

(continued)

Stop Or I'll Shoe (cont'd)

"Too seasonal."
"How about high heels?" he asked.
"Maybe . . . what've you got?"
"We have a pair of red spikes--"
"Oh? Sadie Thompsons, huh? Hmmm . . .no . . .I can't really . . .too cheap."
"What about black patent leather?"
"Too Catholic."
"We have Erica Jongs, Gail Parents, Harold Robbinses and Judy Blumes on sale."
"Too shallow . . . I was looking for something more substantial."
"Hmmm . . .How about Steinbeck loafers?"
"Too big. They'd never fit."
"Dickens?"
"Too ragged and worn."
"We have some black suede Poes."
"Too depressing."
"Mary Shelleys?"
"Too frightening."
"I guess that automatically discounts the Bram Stokers, then?"
"Oh, yes, definitely!"
"What about Cooper mocassins?"
"And take the last pair?"
"Scarlet Letter Step-Ins?"
"Too embarrassing."
"Mark Twain Clodhoppers?"
"They smell like the river."
"Agatha Christie wingtips?"
"I never could figure them out."
"War and Peace Buskins?"
"Too complicated."
"We have a special on Tom Robbins Silver-Sparkled Fantasies."
"They're not sensible."
"Michael Moorcocks's Oxford of the future?"
"C'mon now, who'd believe them?"
"Well . . .That about exhausts our inventory. You might try one of our branch stores . . .We do have a line of philosophical wedgies, political platforms and stream of consciousness sneakers coming in soon. You might want to try back in a week or so."
"I think I'll do that," I said as I walked barefoot out of the store.

*****

Maureen Whitmer

Of Sodom and Gomorrah

The Lord saw Lot lying in the gutter and sent two Angels to his home. When the people of Sodom and Gomorrah heard of this, they grew jealous and wanted Angels of their own. They went to Lot's home and asked him to share his Angels, but Lot said, "Go find your own." The Sodomites and the Gomorron's did not know how to find their own Angels, and drew near to break down the door. Lo and behold, Lot had been given a can of mace and sprayed it in their eyes whenever they came too close.

The Angels went back to Heaven and told the Lord, "You better get Lot out of there or the descendant of Abraham will be beaten to a pulp."

God remembered the times he had tormented Abraham and decided to save Lot, so there might be some kin of Abraham left to torment.

The Angels returned to Lot and told him to crawl under a rock. Lot said, "I will surely perish along with the rest under the rock. Can not I go to the next town? It's just a little town. Oh please, please. let me go there." The Angels said, "Stop whining and go before we change our minds about you."

After Lot and all his kin had left, the Lord came down to destroy the towns. He poured fire

(continued)

down on the lands and stunk up the air with the scent of sulfur. The smell was so awful that Lot's wife turned to see where the smell was coming from and became a pillar of solid room deodorizer.

Lot and his kin entered the little town. The town's people would not have Lot there, however, after they found out he was responsible for the destruction of the best houses of begatting in the land.

Lot and what was left of his kin -- two thirteen-year-olds he had never seen before -- went up to the hills to live. There they found a cave and moved into it, hoping to start a little Sodom and Gomorrah of their own.

*****

Marsha Kline

Moonlight Madness

As the old grandfather clock struck midnight, silence had once again fallen upon the Martin house. The upstairs hallway was darkened, save for a sliver of moonlight that bounced off the hardwood floor as it reflected along the hall's great length.

The minutes ticked away, as the moon climbed higher and the light shone brighter. Silently, the moonlight crept under the doorway, entering the room of the youngest Martin child. It crawled along the baseboard, winding its way around the room, until it terminated in Brian's face.

Yawning, the little boy sat up in bed and attempted to wipe the light from his eyes. His red curls shone golden and his face appeared confused with all the integrity that an eight-year-old could muster, after being aroused from a sound sleep. Brian blinked his eyes three times before he adjusted to the brightness.

The rest of the room remained dark. Slowly, silently, the light crept from the boy's face as it moved downward.

A toy train was snoozing in its track alongside the boy's bed. As the light approached the train station, the train began to move. Small puffs of smoke blew into the air, and a loud blast from the engine broke the silent stillness of the night. The train circled the track, sending up tiny smoke clouds and sounding its whistle at every curve. As the train picked up speed, a strange thing happened. The tracks separated and branched off in all directions as they filled the room. They climbed steep mountains that rose up the side of one wall, then descended the next. They ran through a long tunnel under the boy's bed, finally crossing a river of moonlight that ran alongside the station. As the little engine approached the end of the bridge, it gave one long, shrill blast and jolted to a stop.

The river of light crept across the floor and climbed up the toy shelf in the corner. A big red ball came alive, as the light was centered upon it. The ball jumped down to the floor, bouncing across the room, moving higher and higher with each step.

The little boy's eyes were fixed in shocked expression and his mouth hung open in awe. Not a sound was uttered. The ball was bouncing as high now that it touched the ceiling. It made its way around the room and back to its spot on the toy shelf. The shelves grew dark as the light retracted and moved back to the floor.

The moonlight had provided quite a show for its young audience, and the show was not over yet. The light moved back across the floor, past the train, now fast asleep at the station. It moved up the side of the blue quilt that draped the boy's bed. It focused in on something now -- some sort of lettering. The words were being projected onto the wall in front of the bed. THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK flickered like a giant marquee on the ball. As if by magic, Princess Leah and Luke stepped from the quilt and danced their way merrily across the bed. In an instant, the room had come alive with the characters on the quilt.

Chubakka and R2D2 exploded laser cannons, while Ben Kenobi regulated the tractor beam. And, off in the corner of the room, Han Solo narrowly escaped through a trap door as Darth Vader pursued him.

The clock in the hall struck four now, indicating that the show had gone on long enough. The light had grown dimmer now as the moon slid lower into the western sky. Just as quickly as the show had begun, it was over. One by one, each character climbed back into his respective place on the quilt. The marquee flickered one last time and went out. Brian yawned loudly and slid back onto his pillow. Within a few seconds, he was fast asleep.

All was well in the Martin house as the sun came up that morning. The seventh bell on the clock brought Mrs. Martin scurrying down the hall.

"Brian. Rise and shine. It's time

(continued)

to get ready for school," she called as she opened the bedroom door.

"How did you sleep last night, son?"

Brian bolted upright in his bed, his eyes as big as flying saucers.

"Mom, I had the best dream last night!"

*****

Judy Belfield

Sometimes at Night

Sometimes at night
when it's foggy
I become a shadowy vapor:
Where I begin
and where the mist ends
is a mystery.
The droplets of drizzle and I are inseparable:
We hang suspended under streetlights
twinkling like tiny mirrors;
We dance on green/black leaves in a moonless night
glazing the treetops
with sprays of transparent paint;
We glide grayly through a velvet haze,
lazily shimmering in pockets and folds
of the translucent air.
Sometimes at night
when it's foggy,
I'm an illusion
that dissipates
and evaporates into nullity
and I only seem to be real.

*****

Jennifer Hunt

A Tour of Crianna

Gray suns rise on a mercury sea,
Plutonium gas bubbles burst
Geysers blister the uncharted land
And I was the one here first.

What wondrous planet is this, you ask?
Where did I find this Nirvana?
Relax -- I will tell you all I know:
This is the planet Crianna.

Crianna, you say -- just where is that?
Well, the truth is, nobody knows.
It is a place reserved just for me
Where imagination grows.

Do you see those monsters? Don't be scared!
They are only papier-mache.
Weird things are found, if you'll follow me,
Come! Let's be on our way!

Those pale blue fish in the mercury
They are really not fish at all
They're enormous rats who breathe through straws,
Made hundreds of thousands feet tall.

A little strange do you think? Maybe.
But look in these deep, endless vats.
You see nothing! Oh, come now, look close
Yes! Gigantic purple tom-cats.

Snakes under our feet, writing in sand,
Plastic bats overhead,
Three-eyed rhinos, myopic giraffes,
And lizard skins already shed.

These are the things that make up this world,
It's hard for a mortal to face,
But, then of course, you have to admit
Crianna's a super-new place.

*****

Maureen Whitmer

The Boundaries of the Flesh

He had been sitting motionless for hours. He was lonely again. He thought of watching the video or taking a drug, such as Dio or EFFE, which always seemed to help. He decided on the video, and flipped it on. Its soothing effect seemed to do the trick. He flipped to the three dimensional setting, and the compartment came alive with holograms. He felt like acting along with the leading man and he did so by stepping in and out of the actor's image as it performed. The film was old and was made in the spiral galaxy of Catrin. These sometimes erotic but exquisite films were his favorites. The film was several hours long, and after six hours, the old, nagging thought of time entered his mind.

He should have been keeping track, but he had let several years pass by without making a single log entry.

"I've been a mapper for the Institute of Planetary Studies for 1,100 years, he thought, and I still can't keep a decent log.

He knew he had been in space somewhere between 790 and 800 years, and his destination had been estimated at being 800 years away. It was a clouded region that was so dense, the true readings of the opposite side seemed impossible. He pondered on this a moment and decided it might be a good idea to brush up on Nebulos and other gaseous cloud forms. The log needed to be straightened out too, however, and that really did take priority. He directed a signal to the closest homeport for the correct date. Of course, his distance out in deep space would cause a few hours delay in a signal response. He left the compartment with the video film still playing and walked to the ship's well-stocked library.

He was an explorer at heart, and even on a long mission like this, he still enjoyed his work. His grandfather's father's father's father was in his late seventies, and had always been in Dontares' memory. Dontares was in his mid-twenties, as most all humans he knew. There were only a few elders. He respected them, and was proud to have an ancestry he could trace right to an elder. Not many could.

There was a sudden commotion on one of the monitors. It was the homeport. It was technician, Tines Lesto.

"How you doing, Dontares old boy?" he blared over the

Dontares directed his attention to the distraction and went to flip to three dimensional, but then decided to leave the overbearing Lesto in the monitor.

"So, you've lost count again, have you Dontares?" the bpx boomed.

"Yes," was his irritated reply.

"Yes," Lesto echoed back. "yes? Is that all a man has to say after . . . how long has it been?" He thumbed through his log. "200 years of uninterrupted space travel."

"I had no idea, sir . . ." Dontares began, but was cut short by Lesto.

"Boy, you've got to keep track. You're very near your destination, if all readings are correct."

"I am sir," he replied excitedly.

"Are you doubting the Time Technician's readings?"

"No sir! I mean . . .," he was once more interrupted by Lesto.

"Get your log out, boy. There's already some other lost soul on the receiver."

Dontares copied in the previous years coordinates, and Lesto made him promise, in his unrelenting fashion, a visit if he was ever in that vicinity. Dontares, however, had no intention of ever meeting Lesto face to face.

The excitement of nearing his destination once more overcame him. He ran to the computer telescope and began to fill in the required data for a description of the great cloud.

"There she is!" he said, as the picture formed on the monitor.

He moved over to the manual telescope, pulled it down, and searched the vastness of space for the cloud.

"Still too far," he muttered.

He went back to the computer and filled in the coordinates for time to physical sighting.

"126 days, four hours, thirteen minutes, and ten seconds," the computer crackled.

Great, he thought. Now all I need to do is brush up on Nebulas, get the necessary equipment ready, and I'll be all set.

As the days grew closer, Dontares' excitement mounted. He very near depleted his supply of drugs and at one time he had every video image possible going at the same time. This caused the ship to swarming with life, instead of containing only one man. Things had pretty much settled down by the end of the 126th day, and he had set all monitors on the strange land.

"I see it, I see it!" he exclaimed as it came into focus.

It was actually quite different from what the computer had read out. Dontares, however, was used to this, since computer map-outs were only estimates anyway.

He began to lock in the computer coordinates on the great cloud, but then changed his mind. No, he thought, if anyone is going to take credit for a new discovery, it's going to be me, and the only way to insure that is to take on full responsibility. That way, all information on the cloud will have to be received personally from me.

This is a job for Betsy, he thought. "Ohh, Betsy," he called out.

Betsy's voice answered sweetly, "I am

(continued)

coming Dontares."

The five feet high, three feet wide mobile computer rolled in.

"Betsy, lock in your coordinates with the ship's censors. You're taking over this part of the mission."

"Yes, Dontares dear," she replied.

"Betsy, this is it. We are finally going to make history," he said, as if talking to an old friend.

"Yes, Dontares," she said, as she locked into the ship's censors and began analyzing the data.

"This is strange," she said. "There is an area of the cloud that is highly habitable, but there is no reading of life, human or alien."

"You say there is a habitable area?"

"Yes, it's not a true planet, moon, or other body. My computer readout can only judge it as an area."

Dontares toyed with the idea of putting the mission back on the ship's computer, but then asked, "Can you get an exact reading of this area?"

"Reading of cloud area: atmosphere; nitrogen, oxygen, water vapor, and other trace gasses. Surface: crustal rock, as on planets with this type of atmosphere, except, this is odd, the soil is completely white."

"Try to get a reading behind the cloud," he said.

"Negative, it seems as though there is a linear pattern of emptiness behind the cloud. There is nothing to take a reading off of."

"No wonder," Dontares said knowingly.

Linear patterns were rare and almost impossible to detect, unless you were able to get right to the mouth of one.

"Well, I guess that explains one of the mysteries, and creates another. I am going down to the surface, Betsy, prepare the Solocraft."

"Yes, Dontares," she replied, and they both went down to the docking area.

As she prepared the craft, Dontares studied the extent of the cloud's area. It was massive.

"Your craft is ready," she stated.

He boarded the vessel, set the destination coordinates and departed. As he neared the cloud, his visibility became zero. He kept in touch with Betsy telepathically.

(How am I doing, Betsy?)

(You're right on target.)

Her familiar voice in his mind calmed his nerves a bit.

(Dontares, you're about 200 feet above the surface of the area.)

"OK. I am bringing her down here" he said aloud, a little startled at the sound of his own voice.

The ship landed gently, as it cruised along the surface. The hiss of the engine quieted and Dontares climbed out. He could not believe what he saw. Directly in front of him stood immense white marble gates whose pillars disappeared into the clouds. Beyond the gates, was a city whose splendor surpassed magnificence. At first, Dontares could only stare at the solid white structures. He marveled at the fine workmanship, the intricate patterns, and the grandeur of it all.

Never in all the grand cities of Demarro has anything such as this been constructed, he thought.

He became aware of his own breathing, and realized the total silence of the city. Dontares proceeded to enter the city's tremendous gates. The only sound to be heard was the echo of his own foot-steps. The area could have been for human existance, he thought, but he doubted if it could have been built by humans. He chose to walk an endless path of white ribbon, which seemed to lead to the heart of the city. Along the way, he passed many fine statues with what seemed to be written inscriptions on them. The garb of these statues and these inscriptions might be able to be analyzed, he thought. He signaled Betsy in his mind.

(What type of analysis do you get from all this, Betsy?)

(You're just going to have to give me a moment, Dontares . . .still checking . . . This is going to take some time. It seems to be a very ancient find and I could have to run across billions of years.)

(I want to stay down here awhile anyway. Signal me when you find something. I won't be going anywhere.)

He proceeded on his quest once more. The buildings he passed were becoming larger and more numerous. He studied them. They were actually great halls flanked by immense pillars. He could only guess at their use. He entered one of them. From the outside, the hall was gigantic, but on the inside, it seemed boundless. His eyes surveyed the majesty of the hall. The ceiling was filled with fluffy, white clouds, and a silvery violet sky with a full moon shining through the clouds. His eyes dropped to the floor, which seemed to generate the brightness of the hall. It was a transparent white that gave him the feeling of buoyancy as if walking on a still pool of water. This place was a paradise, he thought. A great white paradise. He thought of the value of his find to the Institute of Planetary Exploration, and to himself. His thoughts raced.

I could make this become a profitable paradise, after all, it's only 800 years from the Sumetra Galaxy, and surely, people would pay much to visit, let alone study a ready-made paradise such as this.

"Dontares, your ship has finally come in," he said aloud. The words echoed throughout the hall. He laughed a bit. This could make me richer than any Grand Tairn on all the planets of Rura, he thought. He was interrupted by Betsy's familiar voice.

(Dontares, I think I've come up with something.)

(continued)

Boundaries of the Flesh (cont'd)

(What is it?)

(Well, it dates back very far. In fact, it's religious in nature.)

Religious, Dontares thought. There hasn't been any talk of religion since . . since the time before the elders.

Betsy continued. (I have come across several books that all refer to the area. Shall I have them materialize down?)

(By all means.)

In seconds, a small pile of books appeared at his feet. Elders . . . religion how can any of this have anything to do with this place? he wondered as he lifted one of the books. He read the title: The New Catholic Version, Holy Bible. He read another. The King James Version, Holy Bible, and another, Holy Bible, Masonic Edition. He was totally unfamiliar with religion such as this and began to leaf through one of the Bibles. The first passage caught his attention.

He read aloud. "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." Earth, he thought, why did that name seem so familiar to him. Intrigued, he sat on the floor of the hall and beganto read the Old Testament. He didn't know what to make of it all. Why had he never heard of this storybefore? He read the New Testament in hopes of better understanding.

For a long while after finishingthe book, he sat and thought. He tried to piece the fantasy story and the very real heaven together. He knew the story had been originated for men who were not yet evolved enough to use their power for ever lasting life. He figured, when man died physically, his everlasting spirit, as the book called it, still existed and went to heaven for all eternity. But how can this be so, he thought. I'd better jet back to the ship and look this up myself.

He got up and left the hall. He had only walked a few feet when he heard a faint humming sound.

"Betsy, is that you," he whispered.

The humming grew louder. He looked up into the sky and saw a faint light traveling toward him. He stood, frozen with fear and curiosity. The light encompassed him and the humming ceased.

"Dontares, we have been expecting you," a melodious voice called out.

Dontares swallowed hard and asked, "Who are you?"

"I have many names," was the answer.

"Oh," Dontares uttered. He grew more self-assured. "Won't you tell me one?"

"You are a wise man, Dontares,"

"Thank you." He was beginning to wonder if he was ever going to get a straight answer from this . . .entity.

"Please," Dontares asked, "what happened to everyone here?"

"There are many, many spirits here, Dontares." Dontares self-consciously looked around himself.

"We are invisible to you. It has taken the combined energies of millions to allow this discourse."

"This is heaven?" Dontares asked.

"Yes, many have called it by that name."

"Why . . . why is it forgotten. What happened?"

"Dontares, when mankind was young, very young, his flesh was as mortal as that of lesser animals. Man and nature changed him. Gradually, life was extended to the infinity it has reached."

"And what of earth," he asked.

"The earth was man's cradle. It was a harsh place with many barriers to be conquered. On earth, man's flesh died easily from sickness, famine and his own cruelty. His reward, or better, his spirit's reward, was here. Once he had passed through the boundaries of the flesh he was given everlasting life.

"Men, such as yourself, no longer have a use for heaven. The fact that man became immortal at the same time of the earth natural destruction by its own sun was more than coincidental."

Dontares listened intently.

"Man has become the equal to his spirit." He has, in fact, bettered it. You are not unlike one of heaven's own angels.

"Dontares, you must go. Send no men here. The many spirits must live in peace. It is their right. Man has no use for heaven and heaven has no use for man. You must build your own heavens, you have the capabilities."

"Others will come this way," Dontares said.

"Yes," said the voice. "We will tell them what we have told you."

The voice was more than a voice, Dontares realized. It was a voice that could only be obeyed

"I understand you," was all Dontares could say. It was all that needed to be said.

With that, the voice disappeared, and the light returned into the sky.

Dontares slowly walked back to the Solocraft. He knew he had to leave, but he was reluctant to do so. It was so beautiful that he could not help but feel jealous. He started to get into his craft. He wondered about the men of earth. Had they truly been lesser than he? After all, had they not surpassed the boundaries of the flesh, thus enabling them to live for all eternity in heaven?

(Betsy, I'm coming home.)

*****

Jennifer Hunt

In The Green Meadow

In the green meadow
There is only one shade tree
With its big green leaves
Hiding the birds in their nests
And the small boy under it.

*****

Laura Lauth

I'd Like to Tell a Story
(Ballad)

I'd like to tell a story
Of a friend who had to flee
When asked a fatal question
She left the nunnery.

To fill her father's final wish
She joined, put on the veil,
A cloistered order of singing nuns
She played piano, and grew pale.

They got her up at dawn each day
And off to pray she'd trudge
A nineteen-year-old broken hearted
Holy Ghostly married drudge.

She scrubbed the dishes, pots and pans,
And tried in desperation
To hide the sweat upon her brow --
Forbidden perspiration!

They said she could teach music
But she needed a degree
Off she went full time to college
"Get done quickly," the decree.

The cloistered years had made her shy
She kept her eyes downcast
And didn't see the longing gaze
Of the young man in her class.

For months he watched her every move
His gaze became a stare
Until one day he blurted out
"What color is your hair?"

Her habit felt like prison garb
She refused her final vow
Put down her veil, rejoined the world
She's a cocktail waitress now.

*****

J. D. Guse

Insatiable Urges

Insatiable urges
for girls in
plaid skirts,
white shirts,
bobby socks.
Pendulating walks thru
halls,
guarded by
walls,
doors,
and floors.
Love thy neighbor.
Know thy stranger.
(in the Biblical sense?)
Obsessed
with thoughts of
passion
for girls in
plaid skirts,
white shirts,
bobby socks.

*****

Judy Belfield

Rhythmic Pulsations

Rhythmic pulsations
pervade every nerve
and a throbbing drumbeat heat
seizes my senses.
I am slave
to an incandescent cadence
that thrums and rumbles inside,
repeating itself again and again,
restraining reason in an iron prison
and hammers at my loins
with relentless determination
And I am crazed
by the demon captor
who stands by and gloats
as I plead for release.

*****

Michael A. Stillman

I Fall into the Sky of Her Blue Eyes

I fall into the sky of her blue eyes
I see a silent orb begin to spin
My currents throb in electric surprise
Can I land my life, let this journey end
Watching, willing, waiting, strapped to the floor
"Periscope Promise," computer explains
Shooting premonition: turn off, ignore;
Caution to the wind, all fuel to the flame!

Some men learn by the light of the fire
The rest must learn by the scar of the burn
Her desert planet scorned my desire,
To the cold empty space I must return
How can I forgive the wide-eyed wonder
How can I forget the burning thunder

*****

Judy Belfield

She Looks at Him in the Red Glow

She looks at him in the red glow
of a painted flourescent bulb
and the music of a thousand violins
plays its straining, longing notes
deep inside
where slick and glistening secrets gurgle.
She studies his softly tinted scarlet skin,
his squinting, sparkling eyes --
and she touches his cheek
with the featherfingers of her mind.
She shudders
as a trembling nerve quivers in her thigh
and aches in waves
of wanting.
Whispering words reverberate in her veins --
words of greedy need she never speaks
but feels them charge unceasing through her blood.
And she closes her eyes,
and tries to think of baseball
or balloons.

*****

Judy Belfield

Don't Tread on Red

Like a stoplight,
the red shirt said,
"Do not proceed."
And I pleaded --
interceded for Reason
against the foe.
Reason said,
"Heed the command of red,"
and I conveyed the message to the fiend
but the demon plugged his ears,
stuck out his tongue
and said,
"I will lust
after any chest I please."
And all the while
the blaring scarlet screamed,
"Flaming desire!
Stop.
Crazy passion!
Stop.
Attack!
Stop."

*****

Julie O'Connell

Love fell over and broke itself

Love fell over and broke itself
into four pieces
of blue
It fell off a mountain
onto the floor of my room
and sat
to look at me
with a surprised look
so I picked it up
crushed it
and cried
wishing it never existed.

*****

Judy Belfield

When All the Pain had Ended

When all the pain had ended
and I began to see some faults,
I felt uneasy because he wasn't perfect --
be and I had thought he was.
Then, for a while,
I thought I'd never really loved him
even though I'd had all the classic symptoms
and I began -- again -- to wonder
just what <u>is</u> love! Had <u>I</u> felt it?
Much later, he touched me with a word and I knew:
Yes, whatever love is, I'd felt it,
and no, it doesn't die -- it changes,
maybe for the better,
because now I see his imperfections
but I also still see what it was I loved him for
and it isn't blinding any more.

Pat Bohler

A Story About Passin' On

She poked the child in his fat little rump with the tip of her cane, as he backed into range of her. He squealed. The "Old One," that he had managed to avoid so adroitly all day had actually touched him. His little face was livid with indignation as he spun around to face her. "Stop it," he said, resting his dimpled hands on his hips.

Everyone gathered there responded with chuckles of admiration. They'd all been poked with that cane at one time or another but had never dared tell the old lady to "Stop it." They were surprised though to see him grin and inch toward her obviously hoping for a second poke.

They saw the expectant twinkle in his eyes fade as she spoke. "My Grampa Johnson used to poke me with this very cane. Warn't no bigger than that little fella right there." She poked at, but missed her quick little target. He giggled and pranced back and forth in front of her. "He'd corner me under Gramma's bed and poke at me when my Dad wasn't lookin'. That was 94 years ago when the old lady was dyin'. Funny that I should think about her dyin' just now. Anyhow she had two of her granddaughter's stayin' with her on the farm. They weren't sisters. They were cousins to each other though." She paused, resting her chin on the head of the cane. "Funny, I can't even remember their names. Anyway, they got into a fight and the old lady accidently fell backwards down the basement steps tryin' to put a stop to it. Fell all the way to the bottom. Hurt real bad inside. Everyday, my dad would put me on his shoulders and we'd go across the creek, up the hill to the big house to visit with the old lady. Like I said, she was dyin'. Yeah, and Grampa would torment me with this cane."

She twirled it in the air over her head. "When I'd see him comin', I'd crawl under Gramma's bed to get away from him, but whenever my dad wasn't lookin' the old man would poke me with the cane. He never talked. He just poked and poked and poked." She jabbed the cane in the air above the child every time she said "poked." He squealed with delight and taunted her, "Ha ha ha, you can't get me," as he inched closer to her.

She smiled. The child looked at her amazed. "Where're your teeth, Grandma?" Everyone giggled.

"You like Gramma's story, huh, little one?" She smiled at him. He stared at her puzzled.

"The old man died of shock," she continued. "He had carried one of Aunt India' little boys down to the barnyard to see the pigs bein' fed. He didn't take the cane with him that day. Couldn't handle the cane and carry the child. Anyhow, he fell and the pigs tore up the child somethin' awful. They went for his stomach and groin. Nearly severed his leg from his body. Don't know how he survived, but he did. Fathered a family too. They tell me he turned out kind of queer in his old age though. Anyhow, Grampa died two days later from the shock of seein' what happened to the boy and feelin' responsible for it, I suppose."

She jabbed the cane quickly into the soft tummy of the three-year-old in front of her. He grabbed the end of it and she pulled him to her, hugged him, and before she could plant a kiss on his cheek, he ran off laughing to inspect the pantry.

She smiled as she watched him disappear. "Little ones always seem to enjoy that story," she said, as she hooked the cane over the arm of her chair.

*****

Judy Belfield

Doppelganger

Show me the picture of the Other
and tell me what she's doing.
What does she feel --
do you know?
do you care?
Let me look at her face again
so I can see my eyes
laughing back at me --
Those eyes don't fool me
with their smile:
I've seen them too often in the mirror
and there are tears welled up
behind the green irises
waiting to spill.
Do you see them too?

*****

Judy Belfield

Get Out on the Highway

I'm doin a nice, safe 55
on highway 55
an I see the sign that says
Jct. 80 - ½ mile.
I decide to take it
an no sooner do I enter
near the center
of the coast to coast linkup,
but I hear
IT
come over the radio.
"Get your motor runnin,"
IT sings to me
and I step on the gas.

I'm goin 80 miles an hour now
an I don't care about cops
or nothin
cause IT's blarin so loud
my speakers are cracklin,
an I'm "lookin for adventure
or whatever comes my way."

The wind is whippin my hair;
it's hot air that smells of exhaust and tires
an this crazy electric feelin
is chargin through my skin --
it's an anticipation of somethin,
an excitement I don't know how to handle --
an I wonder what I'm gonna do when the music ends.
I see a concrete abutment under an overpass
an it looks like a great place to explode.

"Splatter hair on the walls--"
echoes Perry Smith from hell:
Perry and Steppenwolf
got a hold of my soul right now
an I'm heedin the words.
"Fire alla your guns,"
the song says.
"We were born, born to be wild."
"Look out,"
I scream with delicious glee,
my lunatic eye on gray cement
and my heart set on Hades.
I'm checkin out of the Earth Motel
an there aint gonna be a cell of me left
that aint ash.

*****

Laura Lauth

Diffused and Haloed Glow Behind Her Hair

Diffused and haloed glow behind her hair
Eyes shine Love light meaningful reflections
Slender neck arches graceful unaware
Hands laid quiet offer no rejections
Pinpoints gleaming diamond lace is shining
Subtle candle flame coloring the air
Velvet smooth peach skin silky lying
Photograph Lady's provocative stare

How much longer will she betoken beauty
Playful artiface becomes a duty
Painted lady, thin falsehood makes me tired
This made up masquerade has us mired
In superficialities, and lies.

*****

Val Bruech

The Cocktail Hour

Verbs, adjectives, prepositions and nouns,
Adverbs, conjunctions and all the pronouns
Together appeared and ordered some rounds
Preparing for a night on the town.

Apostrophe tittered with Dangling Modifier
And Comma was urged by Hyphen to get higher
Independent Clause cornered Simple Phrase
While Indefinite Antecedents merely lazed.

The crowd grew loud, reason did flee:
Subject and Verb could not agree;
Transitive actives chased teasing complements
While abstract nouns relaxed in easy confidence.

Style strode into the melee
Wrapping the room in gentility
Singular and Plural were arm-in-arm
And what remained of Grammar suffered no harm.

*****

Judy Belfield

Desolate

Sheila Malloy sat facing the glass-doored east wall of a twenty-fifth-story apartment on Lake Shore Drive. She was watching the waves of Lake Michigan break over the sandy beach below as she nursed a martini she didn't really want.

Behind her, the spacious living room was filled with voices, tinkling ice cubes, soft music, and cigarette smoke.

"Great view, huh?" a deep voice said near her ear. Sheila's body jerked, was startled by the sound.

"Sorry if I jangled your thoughts," the voice said.

"No . . .no, it's okay," she answered not turning to see who it was that spoke. She was being rude, not acknowledging the speaker this way, but she wished whoever it was would just leave her alone.

"Mind if I sit here with you?"

"No," she said, minding very much. Why couldn't she ever tell people to bug off! She hadn't wanted her space invaded, didn't want to talk, and now she'd be forced to. A gangly pair of black-polyester legs crossed in front of her and placed themselves next to her on the beige settee.

"The lake is so desolate looking in the winter, isn't it?"

"Yeah," she answered shortly, still not looking at him. "Desolate," she thought, letting the word sit on her mind and bleed its shades of blue and purple through her imagination. She was like the lake, pushed and pulled by forces beyond her control, crashed on the shore, whipped into frenzy and ultimately left alone.

"Barry!" a male voice boomed in on her thoughts. She looked around to see Matt Shelby lean over the settee. "Barry Fisher! Haven't seen you in ages. What have you been up to?"

Barry Fisher, with the gangly legs, stood and faced Matt, shook hands, exchanged greetings, et cetera. Their voices blurred into the chit-chat and prattle and ice-tinkling.

Barry's weathered-bronze face was Roman-nosed and topped by a thick tousling of dark blonde hair. All of his features -- eyes, jaw, cheekbones -- were pronounced and finely sculpted. His eyes were blue and intense. Sheila noted all this, trying not to get caught in the act, but he saw her in the corner of an intense blue eye as he talked distractedly with Matt.

She fingered the red lace of her dress, first at the knee-length hem, and then at the bodice. She smoothed an imaginary wrinkle in her Hanes, three-ninety-eight, cinnamon-shade stockings, and flicked a strand of deep brown hair from her eye. She didn't like being stared at; it made her nervous.

She stood up in her red, strappy, satin high heels and stepped closer to the window. Her breath frosted the pane. She needed some air. It was cold on the balcony, she knew, but she had to get out into the air. She pushed the glass door slightly and stepped outside. She heard Barry's voice say, "Er, look Matt . . . I'll talk to you later, huh?" As she pulled the door shut, his hand was on hers and he stared into her near-black eyes.

"It's awfully cold out there. You'll catch cold."

"I know," she said, freeing her hand and walking out to the stone ledge.

"That dress can't be very warm."

"Look. I didn't ask you to come out here after me and play mother. I don't need somebody to take care of me."

"What do you need," he asked softly, his face very close to hers. Sheila was tempted to laugh, but his eyes stopped her. They didn't have the telltale leer she expected. He seemed concerned. It wasn't a quality she often encountered, and she wasn't sure she liked it. Now she had to say something, rather than reel off a smart remark.

"I'd like to be alone," she said flatly. She turned to face the lake, her arms crossed to hug her shoulders.

"I don't think you'd like that... not really."

"Listen mister: You don't even know my name and yet you stand there trying to psychoanalize me. I said I'd like to be left alone and I meant it -- really!"

"Okay, okay," he said, walking back inside.

Sheila was ready to cry. She always cried when anyone seemed genuinely concerned about her -- either cried or laughed it off as sentimental slop. It was not a time to laugh. She stood on the balcony shivering, not knowing why she had come out. Ah, yes -- for the air. But she didn't really want air. At least, she didn't want to freeze for it. But here she was -- trapped! She couldn't go back inside, not yet anyway. So she cried, streaked her black mascara down her creamy white face and ruined what she'd taken pains a few hours ago to make up just so. "Desolate," that's what he'd said. It was a good word.

She pulled a white linen hanky from her red-beaded purse and dabbed her cheeks. She had to leave. She'd make some excuse to Maggie and go home. She patted under her eyes with the hanky, being careful not to smear too badly, stuffed the black-stained cloth into the bag and headed back into the apartment.

"Maggie, I'm not feeling very well. I think I'd better go."

"Sheila darling, is it anything serious?"

"No. I think I must be getting the flu or something."

"Would you like to lie down in the guest room for a few minutes? I'll get Jeff to drive you home."

"No -- don't bother. I don't want to spoil the party for Jeff. I can get a cab."

"Don't be silly, dear. Of course Jeff will take you."

"No Maggie, please. Don't ask him -- listen, I'll go lie down for a while and maybe I'll feel better."

"You can stay the night if you'd like."

"I'll see. I'll see how I feel. Okay? Don't worry about me, please."

"You're sure now -- you don't want me to get Jeff?"

"Yeah, I'm sure. I just need to lie down for a while. Don't leave your guests, I know where it is."

"All right dear. If you need anything, just call for me, okay?"

"Sure, sure. I'm sure I'll be all right. Maybe it was just the drinks." Sheila gently pulled herself away from Maggie and started down the hallway to the stairs.

"Sheila . . . Sheila Malloy." It was Barry, clacking down the hall as she mounted the steps.

"See? Now I know your name. Is it all right to psychoanalize you now?"

"Oh . . . I'm not feeling very well . . . do you mind if I don't talk right now?"

"I mind. Of course I mind -- what is it? Catch a cold on the balcony? Still want to be alone? Greta -- Darling!"

"Look Barry Fisher, I think I'm going to throw up, and if you keep me here any longer, I may have an accident on this nice marble floor."

"Marble's easy to clean--"

Sheila grabbed her stomach with one hand, clutched her mouth with the other, and raced up the stairs to the guest-room bath and slammed the door. Barry was right behind her. He stood outside the door listening to her retch.

"Are you okay? Are you okay?"

"Go away. Of course I'm not okay. You heard me puking didn't you? Go away!" He opened the door a crack only to have it slammed in his face.

"Get out!" she screamed. Barry crossed the softly carpeted room to the bed, where he sat, waiting . . .

After a while, the door opened and she stood in the frame looking at him. She was annoyed, but she saw that the situation was hopeless: He just wasn't going to leave. She didn't want to create a scene, and anyway, she didn't have the energy.

"Gotta see that my patient's still breathing. C'mere and let Doctor Fisher take your pulse." Sheila dragged herself across the room and sat down next to him on the bed.

"If I let you take my pulse, will you leave?: She offered her arm.

"Hmmm. Racing. Not good . . . not good at all." He looked into her face, pushed her hair back and caressed her cheek. She lowered her eyes and turned her head.

"I suppose you want to get into bed with me," she said, a note of resignation in her voice.

"I'd love to . . . but only if you want me to."

"Want to catch the flu -- or whatever it is I've got?"

"You don't have anything but a touch of nerves, and yes, I'd like to catch it very much."

"I'd say you have enough nerve for both of us."

"You could say that."

"I just did."

"You're not really sick, are you?"

Desolate (cont'd)

"Your diagnoses are right on the button, aren't they doctor?"

"Where I'd like to be." They laughed. While she was still laughing, he began to kiss her shoulder, her neck, crept closer to her face.

"Don't kiss me on the mouth -- I just threw up."

"I don't care."

"Wait, Barry, Don't--" But she didn't care either . . .

Later, Barry slipped out from the covers and started to dress. He glanced over at Sheila's hair spread over the yellow pillowcase. Sheila had felt his every careful move, felt him slowly inching out of bed.

"Don't leave me," she pleaded silently, keeping her eyes closed. "Please Barry, don't leave." But he did, quietly clicking the door shut behind him.

She lay there numbly as morning began to creep into the night sky. She glanced at the clock on the bedside table -- four-twenty-two. Barry had been gone nearly a half-hour. Barry was gone, just like all the others. They all left sooner or later. She'd thought Barry was different, but he wasn't. They were all alike. Oh, it wasn't just men -- people were all alike. Everybody deserted her in time. Nobody ever really cared; they sometimes said they did, but the words were hollow -- she couldn't begin to count the echoes of all the "caring" people she never saw any more. Even Maggie, with her superficial "dears" and "darlings," would soon become an echo of the past. She wouldn't like it if she knew that Barry and Sheila had gotten it on in her guest room. "Liberal" Maggie wouldn't say anything, of course, but Sheila would not be called on the phone or invited to Maggie's parties any more. That was okay with Sheila: She wasn't comfortable around Jeff anyway, since their affair had ended -- Maggie would really be pissed if she knew about that.

She thought about the long line of people in her past and the array of emptiness in her present. "What the hell," she whispered, "I don't need any of them" What did she need? Barry had asked that -- when? It seemed like years ago, when she thought she had seen a caring sparkle in his eyes.

She looked at the clock: Four-thirty-six. Hell was an empty morning waiting for the numbers to tumble on a digital clock. Hell was an empty bedroom filled with echoes of "I love yous" and "We cares."

Christmas was coming; it was two weeks away. Too close. Too empty. She got up from the bed and slipped her red lace dress over her head. Barefoot, she padded down the stairs, through the cold marble-floored hallway, through the thickly carpeted living room, to the sliding glass doors. She looked back over the half-lit, silent room. The ashtrays were full. Glasses -- empty, half-full, lipstick-stained, and tipped over -- littered the tables, the bookshelves, the mantel, the floor. She eyed the beige settee, slid open a door and walked outside. If her feet were cold, she didn't notice. The lake was washing in, grabbing the shoreline and trying to take hold, losing its grasp and plunging back out to gray-green infinity.

"Desolate," Barry had said. "Like me . . ." she thought, "like me . . ."

Moments later her red lace dress lay crumpled on a concrete slab near the sand of a sunless, snow-patched beach. Splotches of red lay near her body, very closely matched in color to the dress.

As her feet had left the ledge, she thought for one split second that she had heard someone call her name . . . but it was too late.

*****

Maureen Whitmer

Bunnies Bunnies Everywhere

How I love your furry faces
peering out from road side places

I observe you from a distance
as you run with mute persistance

I'm hooked on hares you see
rabbit-ites has bitten me

*****

Pat Mulder

Empty Dawns

Old hearts often stop at dawn -
too sad and weary to go on.
Is there any valid reason,
so late in the season,
to make plans, to aspire,
to start the morning fire?
Why break the spell of night
when morning gives a lonely light?
Cold, it is, the blood congeals,
and blankets hide what day reveals -
fingers, toes, and elbows, bent,
the energy of life all spent.
Shadows totter down the halls
to sit and stare at silent walls.
They eat alone, they watch, they wait,
for evening meal, for dusk, for fate.
And who can blame old hearts at dawn,
too sad and weary to go on.

Val Bruech

Small Chances

Jenny and Dart had been jogging almost a mile in the cool Minnesota countryside. The sloping road was lined with leafed timber and rolling hills, and the sun was finishing up its day on this section of the earth, imparting a pinkish-yellow cast to all of nature and the exposed skins of the two friends.

Each found a comfortable stride and rythym to fit the other woman and the road. Jenny opened the conversation.

"Why didn't you tell me you were an All-American, Dart? If I had known I would have been chasing my husband on his jogs instead of doing yoga for the last six months."

"You never asked what I did in my spare time since I moved out here. I thought you'd rather read letters that were filled with conquests of Minnesota lumberjacks and the growing pains of a pottery studio rather than pulled muscles and new jogging shoes."

Jenny gasped out a chuckle. "Hey, I love to hear about whatever you're doing--especially if it's slightly sinful."

"Actually, if you'd been reading between the lines in my letters," Dart responded, "You'd know that the closest I've come to sinning lately is a daily Hershey bar, which is one reason I've taken up running. Really, it's good to get out of the studio, where I'm by myself almost all day, and run and see the country a couple times a week."

Jenny cast a sideways look at her friend as they ran on, working on the second mile, legs and arms moving easily, beautifully together. Dart had let her reddish-brown hair grow beyond her shoulders, and it framed her finely-chiseled face Jenny remembered so well from their college days. In the ten years since they had graduated, she thought to herself, Dart's face was the only one of all their friends and acquaintances that remained unlined and untroubled. Dart labored, as they all did, but her life had always seemed to Jenny to be far more uncluttered and uncomplicated than the corporate and scholastic pursuits many of their friends were immersed in.

The deep glance she had given her friend stimulated a wave of memories in Jenny. She asked, "Do you remember how we met, Cart?" Her friend turned her head as she ran and searched Jen's eyes in puzzlement. Then she smiled. "Not only do I remember how we met, I could almost give you the verbatim conversation," she grinned, "And I haven't even thought about it since then. Talk about the old days, when we were innocent...and whatnot. Anyway, how long has it been since we've seen each other?"

"Well, we all had dinner last Thanksgiving at Mary's-you were there for that, about six months ago, and before that, I think I saw you last at Jan's wedding in New York. That was way over a year ago, huh?"

Dart smiled. "Yeah, you're right." She turned again to look at Jenny. "Gosh, we do go back a long ways." By common, unspoken consent, they both increased the length and quickness of their strides. They were perspiring freely now, and the sun seemed hotter even though it was descending.

After a few hundred more yards at the increased pace, Dart slowed and resumed the conversation. "I met you in the bookstore the first day of classes freshman year--you were looking at English novels and you had your class schedule clutched in one hand and both arms full of math and history course books. God, I still wonder how you pulled a double major in those two subjects--and you dropped your schedule and couldn't get it without dropping about twelve books."

Jenny laughed out loud. "Are you kidding-I don't remember that at all."

"Well, I do," Dart explained, "Cause I remember later on when we got to know each other that I often wondered at how wide your interests were, and how you seemed so clever in school, but you just couldn't keep track of papers or due dates, or get yourself organized at all. It was just like in the bookstore-a genius, happy as a puppy with new knowledge, but a bit screwy about getting to the right place at the right time." Dart knew she was safe in making this criticism in jest, and she was right. Jenny laughed in agreement, and said, "Yeah, but that was in the old days. Now with a kid, and Jack, and a job, I've turned into possibly the most organized list-maker you've ever seen."

"Do you remember that night in freshman year when we all went to your grandmother's wake?" Jenny asked. Dart gave a strong nod instantly. "I can remember that so clearly," Jenny continued. For some reason, you and I ended up driving back to school together in your car. I guess everyone else had to leave early. Remember, we stopped for a drink, and just talked and talked, about our families, and religion, and God-I think it all started because your grandmother had a rosary in her hands." Jenny slowed down as she recalled the evening many years ago. "You know, that was when I first realized just what a super person you were."

Dart smiled brightly. "The start of a beautiful friendship." She slowed her pace to a walk. "Boy, am I beat. We must have done three miles, which is about two over my limit. How about a break?"

"I was hoping you'd say that," Jenny sighed. "I was wondering if they have pick-up services for joggers injured during duty."

Small Chances (cont'd)

The women slowed to a walk. "There's a great spot to watch the sunset about a half-mile back," Dart offered. "It's been years since I saw a sunset without a building in front of it," Jenny responded.

Not speaking, and each thinking her own thoughts about experiences they had shared, the women walked back until they arrived at a grassy glen. They sat on some convenient large rocks and watched the sky change from blue to pink to tomato red as the sun disappeared behind the neighboring hills.

They spoke, as old friends sometimes do, not of the raucous and carefree past, for its value now was only that it had happened, but rather of the everyday encounters and problems that were now so different for each of them. Jenny spoke of her three year old child Kent and his comic antics and rapid growth, her adoring but increasingly work-consumed husband Jack, and her newest batch of crazy friends at her part-time job proof-reading for a newspaper. She listened intently as Dart related how the pottery studio was doing, and how difficult it had been to pay the rent for the first months. Dart told Jenny how, on frequent occasions, she missed the challenge and excitement of the city, but of how peaceful her life had become since moving to the small Minnesota town and setting up her studio.

The women started to shiver in the quickening breeze. They looked up at the fragile pastel sky and realized the sun had disappeared entirely as they talked.

"Time to go back and maybe light a fire," Dart said as she stood and stretched. She leaned over and took Jenny's arm to help her up. "You know, Jen," Dart started in a strangely full voice, "I very much meant what I said about my being peaceful out here, but your coming this weekend makes me happier than you'll ever know."

Jenny stood and looked at her friend in mild surprise. Dart was staring at her intently. "Geez, Dart, I didn't know it meant that much...I mean..when Jack offered to take Kent for a weekend in New York, you were the first person I thought of. Why didn't you tell me you wanted to see me? I had to invite myself out here!"

Dart took a deep breath. "Well, it seems our whole friendship-all those years when we were really close-began with just chance encounters and chance shared interests, and we just seemed to groove on them. I didn't want to tell you how much I wanted to see you because..." Dart's voice dropped off, and she rubbed her eyes hard with her hands. She shrugged her shoulders and squared them back, seeming to gather herself for an effort. "I guess because I didn't want you to know how much I really needed you." She looked at her friend and smiled, relieved that she had said those words. "And because before, just rhrough chance, we were so good together that I didn't want to change it because I thought it wouldn't work." Dart searched her friend's eyes for a reaction. "How's that for a psyched-out analysis?"

Jenny didn't respond: she simply looked at her friend. Realizations began to sweep over her-how their friendship had all been chance, but how real their feelings about each other had grown to be. The love the two had felt for each other years ago had never been sought out by either-it had just happened and grown with shared experiences, and been a part of their lives they had taken for granted, even as each had changed over the years. They had, Jenny thought, grown increasingly apart, as even the best of friends do when visits become yearly instead of daily. Now, with a start, Jenny realized that Dart was asking her to renew their friendship and love. Jenny's own life was happily fulfilled now, and she lived a thousand miles from these hills and the isolated town where her artist friend had come.

As if to reinforce her thoughts, Jenny felt Dart's hand squeeze her shoulder. "Hey," Dart said, "This is way too heavy--the heat's gone to my brain." She laughed, a trifle forced, and added, "Let's go back to the homestead."

Jenny stood still and took her friend's hand in both her own. "Dart, you're right, and I apologize to you for being too stupid to see what's happening. I've just understood what you're getting at. We just can't rely on chance anymore for good friends and happiness to drop out of the sky. We just don't have that luxury."

Dart remained quiet, waiting for Jenny to continue, but her friend did not speak. She dropped her hand and stared for a moment at the now dusky sky which hinted at the presence of stars.

Jenny gazed at the fine, strong, independent features of Dart's face that the world was witness to, and the eyes that now intentionally conveyed no feeling. Jenny crossed the small distance that separated them in two quick steps and embraced her friend quickly, strongly, and released her. "Mon amie," she said, stepping back. "How about that fire you promised?" Dart cocked her head, smiled, and gave up a chuckle that sounded like a song.

They crossed the glen to the road and departed, running slowly, on their journey.

*****

J. D. Guse

The pen is mightier
when I'm bored.

*****

Colleen Moloney

My Beautiful Friend

I just want to say thank you,

for picking me up when the
only way I saw to go, was
down...

for restoring my faith in
life when I saw no reason to
go on...

for saying everything you've
ever said - without even
knowing my name.

You said these beautiful things
then you were gone.
Where did you go? - What were you
doing?
Four years later you show up.
I've missed you - your helping hand,
your magical words.

You've changed--
you seem to have lost all the
faith you showed me.

You've changed--
you seem cynical, pessimistic,
your words don't sound familiar.

You've changed-- doesn't everybody?
doesn't everything?

What will never change is the past -
what you did for me.

And like I started to say before I
was taken by my emotions-- thank you
My beautiful friend...Thank You.

*****

Jason Coleman

To Tell A Lie

"Calling all liars. Calling all liars," the megaphone warbled. Stuffing the uneaten portion of a hotdog into my saliva tomb, I left the concession area and headed toward the voice. The magnifying glass overhead burnt the area; however, a colorful breeze traveling through the carnival atmosphere neutralized the heat's effect.

In the distance, more people swarmed around the presentation platform, and the amplified larynx continued, "Our last entries will begin in just a few minutes and then we will all find out who are this year's 'Worlds Greatest Liars'." From the crowd, which was still forming throughout the open area, arose a chuckling cheer, ascending to block the mid day sun. I lengthened my zebra trot so as not to miss any of the action.

I was quite surprised to encounter as many video crews as I did. The yearly event always captured national attention, bringing fleeting fame to its small, mid-western, sponsoring town, but this time it must have pulled publicity in from all corners. I considered the coverage interesting and contemplated their definition of news.

The country surroundings added to the merryment. Booths of all varieties scattered the landscape, and a pumpkin umbrella enclosed a large expo arena selling worthless tidbits. Worthless to the public, but of prized value to all participating hobbyists.

"It's really wonderful that the initiator of this award came forward and started this tradition fourty-five years ago," the announcer added jokingly, "I'm amazed someone didn't get the idea sooner. People tell fibs every day."

Joining the lake of heads and hats, I took his statement a bit more seriously. Sure, I was as fun loving as the rest of the people at this three day "Falsehood Festival", but my attitude toward the subject seemed more refined. I felt that most everyone did not realize the psychology behind lying; furthermore, a strong sense of guilt accompanied the others approach. I had once responded that way.

I think my greatest inspiration came from a man I never met. Trygve Lie, a Norwegian, and the first Secretary General of the United Nations, sparked the fire within me to go out into the world and give it all that was in me. Nothing in particular he said cleared the filibuster in my mind. It was just the combination of his name and the work he was associated with...politics.

As the final few outlandish, outrageous, and indepth fibs continued to be featured from the front of the makeshift stage, my perception of the idea widened. I mean if you are going to tell a lie, make it a good one! I figured that lying is one of the few things left to do which is neither illegal or controlled. It is only controlled by your own creativity, and only illegal in the court room. I questioned the court room.

With free religion allowing disbelief in the Bible, an oath of truth is unreliable; on top of that, a lie detector only records physiological phenomena supposedly connected with lying: abnormal respiration, perspiration, or abnormal heartbeat. I would certainly condole an unhealthy or athletic person hooked up to one of those cardboard contraptions.

Anxiously awaiting the results from the festival's activities, I surveyed the assemblage. A splinter of hope swept in front of me, for fortunately, I realized that lying had become more popular lately. Each individual, hoping to gain recognition in the category of their selection, must have some interpretation of fibbing finesse. From this remote location in Wisconsin, my competitors would return to their respective homes across the country. Some would participate in deceptive business deals and corporate lies; others to child rearing with the Easter bunny and the tooth fairy. The

splinter grew into a giant redwood, and a proud feeling of accomplishment burned within me.

"The first prize winner in the essay division of our awards this afternoon, with the original selection 'If you don't have enough nerve to equivocate, at least stretch the truth' is.."

The pause was no suspense builder to me. I was totally taken aback when I heard my title. I had received an honorable mention a few years ago, but I simply enjoyed participation. Stepping forward to accept the award, my mind went blank. Gone were any philosophical implications I could pass along. I guess there was actually no need.

I proceeded in the jest of the situation, "You know it really came as no surprise to me that I won this award. Not that I'm boastful. I was chatting with Ireene Hughes yesterday in London, and she told me the news from a vision that came to her in a nightmare...."

*****

Pat Mulder

Ode to a Wooleyworm

Fuzzy little fellas
'jest scrunchin 'cross the road,
North ones goin' South,
'n South ones goin' North,
warming furry bellies,
'n gettin' squished like jelly!

Hey, guys, I gotta tell ya -
there's weeds the same
one side 'er the other,
and them that hides
on leaf or stem
don't come to no grief -
so keep them stubby little feet
outta' the middle 'a the street!

*****

Marsha Kline

Kline's Kolumn

Some people disgust me! You know-the one's who eat all the time and never gain an ounce. My husband for instance-three meals prepared for the Giant in the castle at the top of Jack's Beanstalk and a hearty midnight snack enough to feed the six hungry kids next door, and still he maintains his neat trim little body. And then-those people who shrug their shoulder's and say something like, "Desserts? No, I've never been a sweet eater. That's one thing I've just never cared for!" Have you ever run into the raw vegetable snacker? Now there's a person who really knows how to bring me down. And then there's me. I eat the cookie dough before it goes into the oven to bake because I just can't wait any longer and looking into a bakery window adds 10 lbs. instantly! So what do you

do when you were born to crave sweets, love food and insist on staying slim? Well, you spend a lot of time dreaming, little time eating and the remainder of time

FRUSTRATED!

*****

Brad Hayes

Quiet Crossfire

In June, on the lakes of the Quetico-Superior, the sun shines through the crisp air of northern Minnesota with an unexpected power. Mirrored by the clean surface of clear waters flowing north from the Lawrencian Divide, its force is doubled. Striking face, neck and hands from above as well as below, it weathers everyone traveling within its rein. The experienced look of health and exposure come quickly as the sun and wind do their work.

Flowing free to Hudson Bay and beyond, the waters are drawn from the upper reaches of Minnesota, north through Ontario Province. Lined with fir and birch, the deep lakes are strung out along a great connecting waterway. Lakes are linked one to another by whitewater runs, wide, deep channels of fast flowing water, and cascading falls. For canoe travelers moving north through this system of water and sun, the routine of traveling from one lake to another provides welcome relief from the crossfire of sun and its rebound.

As the bow of the aluminum canoe began to slide up onto the gravel shore line, Nick and Bill each thrust back from their seats to push the canoe up another few inches onto the rocks. Nick lept ashore and pulled on the 17 foot craft which had brought him and Bill up through the long series of lakes and portages. Bill climbed out and joined Nick as he pulled once more sliding the canoe up onto the shore. The men worked quickly to unload their equipment.

"Which do you want, Nick?"

"I'll take the canoe, then let's come back for the rest."

After hoisting the canoe up over his head and lowering its yoke to his shoulders, Nick started down the trail with Bill walking in front guiding the bow. Bill carried paddles and life jackets.

For Nick the portage was the last push before a welcome rest. He knew that the bumpy trail of rough ups and downs would end with the splash of the canoe being pushed off his shoulders onto the clear surface of the next lake. The canoe was heavy. Its weight pressed down hard on his shoulders. Nick moved quickly along the trail hoping to find the shoreline and relief over each rise in the trail.

When the bottom of the canoe

finally slapped the quiet surface at the end of the portage Nick straightened and felt the muscles at the back of his neck recoil from the strain of carrying the heavy load. Nick stopped a moment and gazed across the blue water.

"God, it's great here. Really perfect." After another moment he continued, "The space just draws it all right out of you.

"Things are simpler here too," said Nick. "When you're up here everything back home stops. It's not there waiting for us; it ends. Up here you're so far away from it the rest of it doesn't even exist anymore. Here it's just trees, water and sun.

"You know, from here we could go up through the Quetico into Ontario all the way to Hudson Bay."

As Nick stood on the pebbled shore he felt a slight movement of air off the blue water against his now ruddy face. "I've thought of this place a lot since we were here last. It's a touchstone for me. Memories of the water and sun of the Quetico-Superior always remind me of other times we've had: other places we've been. You know Bill, we've seen a lot. The Beartooth, the Absorka, the Missions, Vail. They were all good. Its always been good." Nick stood for a moment before continuing, "We should do it more often. It really doesn't matter where we are. It's always good."

Bill hesitated as both men watched a wind gust cross the water before them; its path marked by a pattern of small surface riffles. "You're right Nick. It is good here."

As they turned to retrace their steps Nick felt the absence of the heavy canoe. His light tennis shoes seemed to bound down the trail. The path ran along a series of tumbling falls.

"Come on lets take a look," Nick said as he broke from the trail and cut over to the rushing stream. Bill followed as Nick led the way through the brush to the edge of the rapids.

Before them they saw huge volumes of water pounding down the rocky channel which separated the two large quiet lakes. The sounds of the falls had been masked by the heavy growth surrounding the narrow waterway.

Standing on the large flat rocks above the chasm each felt the power of the waves pulsing over the boulders below. Nick watched as Bill stared intently into the pool below the falls.

Bill stood far out on a large rock. Mind, blowing down the channel, brought the cool spray of heavy mist. Nearly hypnotized by the sound and motion, Bill watched the water pour into the dark pool below. There, in that cold deep hole where bubbles seemed to take minutes to reach the surface, Bill fixed his gaze.

Nick studied Bill as he stood motionless on the edge of the large outcropping. The deafening sound continued as the mist rose up from the cold rushing water. When the men finally left the cool moist corridor neither spoke. Soon they reached the place where they had left their packs and quickly gathered their gear for the trip back up the trail to where they had left the canoe.

When they finally reached the canoe they loaded the packs. The life jackets and extra paddles were put under the seats. Nick took his place in the bow. Silently, Bill pushed off and the canoe slipped quietly from the cool shade into the unforgiving glare of the sun.

*****

J. D. Guse

Wild Blue Horizons

Wild Blue Horizons,
like nothing I've seen
before.
Waiting silently, after
the storm,
for the colors to
burst forth,
to control my mind,
and to put a cap
on a beautiful
picture.

*****

Tom Madai

Off The Beaten Path

Welcome to McDonald's, scene of much of today's tour. I have arranged a complete tour of the store during its daily operation. Let's listen as the crew functions smoothly:

"Back room, we need boar's vomit on two-- I mean ice!"

The person assigned to that group of tasks collectively known as "Back Room" is also responsible for supplying condiments and meat to the Grill Team, shake mix, sundae mix, cups, and anything else that happens to be in short supply. Notice how the person in the pickle suit gets the ice from the machine; I've heard that he hits the ice bucket fully sixty per cent of the time now, which is a big improvement over what he did last tour.

He often has to make two trips, because only half the ice in the bucket actually makes it to the bin. Hey, you, with the ice bucket! Come here!

"What?"

"Would you please explain to these people why only half the ice ever makes it to the bin?"

"Certainly. First, however, I'd like to know how many of you are familiar with Newtonian physics. Nobody? It figures."

"Just what does Newtonian physics have to do with your clumsiness?"

"Nothing, really; I just wanted to know who else knows it besides me. I

also don't spill ice that often, at either stage. Now if you'll excuse me, I'll fill the bin."

"Ten to one he spills at least some ice." an anonymous viewerrygilēd.

Thirty seconds later, not an ice cube was to be found outside the bins, unless you count the ones under the counter. Here is a window person. Let's talk with her.

"Excuse me, but you don't seem to be too busy at the moment; is it all right if you talk with us?"

"Sure. What do you want to know?"

"First of all, we'd like to know how you feel towards the advertising the corporation does. For example, how do you like it when the powers-that-be say that grill people love to cook?"

"I agree only half way. I mean, we like to serve the public and all that, but when little old ladies order specials, or anyone else, for that matter, does, we dislike it! I think that the people on grill say it best; hit it, boys!"

"Hold the pickle, hold the lettuce, special orders sure upset us, all we ask is that you let us serve it our way!"

"Well, that was certainly an interesting statement. What do the rest of the crew have to say?"

"We really mean it!"

"Back room! Shake mix!"

"Excuse me, but how did you know that the shake machine is drained?"

"The only thing that comes out is syrup, and the lights are on."

"The mix is in, and as official tester, I will have some boar's vomit to slake my thirst," said the guy in the pickle suit.

"My word, you people certainly have odd dietary tastes around here. How does one get boar's vomit from the k shake machine?"

"It's quite simple, actually. Just mix all three flavors of shake. How's it look, Kim?"

"Get away from me! You're icky!" she said. "He also drinks suicides."

"I take it a suicide is a mix of all the drinks?"

"Yes. They're pretty good, but boar's vomit is disgusting. If you'd like, I'll make one for each of you."

"Actually, I was thinking more about boar's vomit. It sounds interesting. And while you're at it, pour a suicide in with the boar's vomit."

"Excuse me a second, please. THOMAS! Get over here!"

"You screeched?" he said. "I hope it's important, because the towel duel of the century is going on right now, and I don't want to miss it!"

"Why did you do it?"

"Do what?"

"Look at what they're drinking!"

"It looks like fermented rat intestines to me. It's better than boar's vomit, and is chock full of vitamin C."

"You're sick!"

"Thank you. Flattery will get you everywhere. Since the duel is over by now, I will do my cleanup. While you have been loafing up here, the store has closed, the food has been counted and eaten, and yours truly has washed almost all the dishes. You have yet to start your cleanup, which means you'll be here when the dawn arrives on the morrow."

This has been a walk OFF THE BEATEN PATH. Thank you for bearing with us on what is the first of a long series of tours. And remember,

When you're feeling tired and weary
In need of some relief,
Talk to Ms. O'leary,
Our one misguided chief!

*****

Jason Coleman

Cult Of Gods Beyond

Sunshine hugged the mountain ridge and began to bend down the slopes toward a village. However, sweat was already heavy on the islanders' foreheads, as light rays silhouetted their forms. Although the clear mid-day sky was already tropic blue, all workers awoke simultaneous to the unseen sunrise on the oceans edge hours before; furthermore, they were continuing religious requirements necessary to their cult. With each increase in brilliance over the mostly barren land, one would have glimpsed the several thousand busy natives, each probably wondering about the cultural origin of their combined efforts.

Great stories of the past from leader-teacher Momoko-Hani convinced at least one Polynesian. Rano Ahtau, carrying several large stone axes, made his way across a steep, rocky slope toward the open work area. Handing the newly sharpened tools to laboring sculptors in trade for those worn and dull, Rano's thoughts questioned only if some fortunate, forthcoming day he too would carve "the giants" alongside many fellow villagers. For the present, however, he diligently attended to his assigned duty of hammering, scraping, and shaping the cumbersome utensils.

Ahtau was considerably lucky, compared to the multitude of muscular workers on this particular section of the island, because he had necessary need for mobility. Whereas the builders naturally kept stationary, in a group related environment, the repeated round trips, from rocky cliff areas with sharpening stones to "the giants'" birthplace resting on the volcanic slopes, allowed Rano to view the scenic coastline. Most importantly, he could behold the standing figures themselves, guarding the island, upon their altars.

Staring at the open-bowled eyes and the straight forward chin, or jutting lower jaw protuding like an impene-

trating vessel's bow, the rather young, dark skinned male stood silently. Once again in awe of the hundreds of statues beyond Rano's vantage point, the monoliths observed so often sent a strange chill of warmth, unfelt before, through his inspired body.

He remembered Momoko's explanation of the Bird-man ritual in which Rano's own father was fatally malled by sharks, while attempting to swim to the Nui islet for a manutara egg. He couldn't remember his father. He recalled the Hiva Mantou ceremony on a day when winds and rains were so troublesome that the gods were disputed by many chiefs. He didn't understand the civil war that followed or the separation of his people. A wise Moko restored order to one cluster and renewed some beliefs; however, the cult had lost man power. Rano remembered the prophecies of destruction if the religion didn't survive; a point Hani emphasized.

The thunderous sound of Rano's thoughts echoed through the area, and in that instant he was encased by lava from behind. Billowous dense smoke blocked the afternoon sun, while a wall of waves simmering with steam oozed down the mountain. Most of those destroyed left with eyes toward embryos of stone and minds in a similar state. At least one understood; leaving us to wonder.

Some large erect heads protude today from volcanic ground in the Pacific on Easter Island.

*****

Jennifer Hunt

The Christmas Gift

A ray of sunlight pierced the gap between the curtains and explored the sleeping face of the elderly woman sprawled over a rumpled bed. Clad in a uniform that marked me as a worker in this Old Folks' Home, I made my way toward the window and slowly, quietly pulled the cord that parted the curtains.

An explosion of sunlight diffused itself into the room, and the eyelids of the drowsy patient reluctantly fluttered, acknowledging the sudden brightness.

"Mrs. O'Leary," I said gently, still battling a tinge of guilt that played on my nerves. "Mrs. O'Leary, it's time to get up."

"Gimme five more minutes," she begged, not opening her eyes.

I signed and smiled a little. "All right," I murmured. "But you slept late, and you need to be down to eat your breakfast soon." Then, remembering I added, "Merry Christmas Eve, Mrs. O'Leary."

Mrs. O'Leary didn't reply, and I left the room. Since she was the last patient for me to awaken, I headed for the kitchen to help get the breakfast trays ready for the patients. On my way I passed the tall, stately ever-

green laced with tinsel and ornaments that was a reminder of tomorrow's holiday. Other decorations, including wreaths, had been made by patients, and these were hung about the lobby to complement the tree, the room's present main attraction. The total effect was bright and cheerful.

Spurred by this sight into remembering my plan, I glanced at my watch to be sure I had time enough, and slipped into a pay phone booth in the lobby.

With childish excitement, I inserted two dimes and dialed Tony's number.

Tony's voice on the line was pleasant. "Hello?"

"Tony, it's me, Lisa!"

"Oh . . . hi!"

"I just called to say that I can't wait till you come down to our house tonight because I have a terrific present for you! Oh, and I was wondering if you could come a little earlier--Mom says we'll eat at six-"

"Lisa," The uncertainty in Tony's voice was so thick that I sensed it over the line, miles away.

"What's wrong? Can't you come tonight? Oh . . . Tony . . ."

"Look, Lisa," Tony sighed, "It's been so difficult."

"What had?"

"You and me living so far apart--going to different high schools in different towns. Ever since I moved it's been almost as though we're from separate countries; things aren't the way they used to be . . . we hardly ever get to see each other-"

"But we will tonight!" I exclaimed half-questioningly.

Tony was silent for a moment, and his reluctance to speak weighed heavily on both of us.

"I might as well tell you now, Lisa. I . . . uh . . . well, I met this girl in my new high school . . . we have a lot in common . . . I really like her," Tony said, and then, taking a deep breath added, "Lisa, I won't be seeing you anymore . . . I'm really sorry."

I felt injury and disbelief as I heard the click of the receiver on the other end of the line, and the immediate hum of the phone. The horrible emptiness of rejection inflicted its wound in me. I felt slapped in the face. Even the glittering, ornamented Christmas tree laughed at me as its lights winked on and off mockingly.

I pinched myself to convince myself of the reality of the situation, which could possibly turn out to be a nightmare. These things usually did, I told myself helplessly; I wasn't in luck.

This can't be true; I told myself over and over again as I vacated the phone booth and sat down on one of the lounge chairs. If it were true, I'd be in tears. Why wasn't I crying, anyway? I seemed to be unable to accept what had occurred, and because of that, could not bring myself to allow a sense of gloom to overtake my emotions.

I had so looked forward to celebrating our first Christmas together with Tony. I had taken for granted that it would be the first of many. I thought of the terrific sweater I'd spent many hours knitting for him to give him as a Christmas gift--something I'd put a great deal of time and effort into so that it would be meaningful. It was in green--his favorite color.

I still could not bring myself to believe what had occurred. Although I had unconsciously feared this since Tony's move, the break-up was so sudden. Its total significance hadn't quite sunk in yet.

I allowed my mind the luxury of pondering over past happinesses I'd shared with him, until a familiar voice behind me brought me back to the present.

"Well!" exclaimed Mrs. O'Leary in mock horror. I looked up and rested my eyes on the diminutive patient, smiling kindly, seated in a wheelchair in feigned shock as she looked at me, "Look who's daydreaming on duty," she said. "Shame!"

As I studied the pale wrinkled face of the elderly woman, I suddenly was gripped by genuine fear of old age. I also felt overwhelming sympathy for all those withered souls who inhabited this home, including the rather ancient, yet still lively Mrs. O'Leary.

I forced cheerfulness on myself, for this was an important part of my job. "Yes, I'll admit I'd probably be richer if I were paid for daydreaming time, instead of work time."

Mrs. O'Leary chuckled and her eyes wrinkled at the corners.

"I see that you're using a wheelchair this morning. Are your legs bothering you again?" I asked.

The elderly woman glanced about to make certain that no one heard as she hoarsely whispered, "No, I'm just feeling lazy this morning."

I managed a smile, although I knew she was lying. Old age certainly hadn't dampened Mrs. O'Leary's sense of humor. I wished fervently that I could someday learn to cope with disappointment as some others did.

Tony, I remembered with pain, had been one able to take disappointment in stride.

I wheeled Mrs. O'Leary into the cafeteria to one of the tables at which the patients ate their meals, and left her with several other elderly patients who were absorbed in the process of eating. Watching some of them, one would have thought it was a major accomplishment to lift food with a fork and place it into one's mouth. Indeed, for some of these patients it was. Many were senile, or nearly so, and often simply lacked the energy to accomplish the feat of feeding themselves with any degree of ease.

I remained for a few moments after placing Mrs. O'Leary's breakfast tray

The Christmas Gift (cont'd)

before her, and watched the other patients eat, remaining nearby so that I could offer aid if necessary. Moved by the common force of hunger, the seated patients did their best. Yet many could feed themselves only with as much proficiency as a small child learning the act for the first time.

I did not openly offer to help any of the patients, for I did not want to tease their pride. Yet I hovered nearby in case any of the patients would request help in their frustration.

Tony would have admired the independent spirit that compelled these disabled elderly to do their best, I thought. This brought back the sting of memory. Although I'd still not fully accepted what had occurred, the pain of rejection was beginning to invade my emotions. I wanted to curl up in a corner and be forgotten.

Perhaps I already belonged in an Old Folks' Home for, although only seventeen, I felt considerably older. I felt that part of my life had caved in, making me empty. For the first time as I looked about the room I drew close to the vacant staring souls that occupied the space in the room. We all had something in common. Rejection. Only these persons were rejected by their families, not boyfriends.

Suddenly, an elderly man accidentally spilled a glass of orange juice, and he watched in fascination as the golden orange liquid moved in an ever-enlarging puddle across the table. The other patients, accustomed to such occurrences, merely continued to eat in silence.

I leaped into action, quickly found a couple of paper napkins and used them to mop up the liquid before it could quite possibly drip onto a patient's lap.

This action struck a familiar chord in my memory bank. The first time I'd met Tony, tall, good-looking, athletic, was in the lunch line at school where I'd been jostled by another student accidentally, as I had reached for a plastic cup of orange juice. The liquid had spilled over onto Tony's tray, and I'd spent the next few minutes in uttering awkward apologies and mopping the liquid off his lunch tray with a paper napkin.

Had fate pulled that experience from my memory bank into the present to slap me in the face in painful recollection? I was jolted into realizing that Tony, who had been such an important person in my life in the past few months, had now severed our relationship permanently.

I gasped helplessly in an automatic preventative measure to keep from shedding tears. I could not restrain them, and was soon sobbing. Without thinking, I ran from the room and, for lack of anywhere else to go, I stepped into the lobby which, unusually, was empty.

That is, empty except for the Christmas tree, a symbol of joy that had now become firmly annexed to unhappiness in my mind.

Sinking into one of the vinyl, cushioned chairs, I put my head in my hands and allowed myself the luxury of shedding my sorrow in the form of tears.

Soon I felt the presence of another person in the room. Looking up during a lull in my sobbing, I saw that, once again it was my friend Mrs. O'Leary. "Go on," she encouraged. "Don't mind me. It's good to cry it all out, though I don't see any reason in crying over spilled milk. . . uh, orange juice in this case, I guess."

I managed a smile through my mask of tears, but then my unhappiness smothered me again, and I began once again to cry. Mrs. O'Leary waited patiently as I took a tissue from the pocket of my uniform and wiped my tears.

"Now," Mrs. O'Leary said, after my sobbing had quieted a little. "It's an awful shame to have such a young girl crying on Christmas Eve." She looked at me and added, "It's not just because of Mr. Cooper's orange juice accident, is it, Lisa?"

I shook my head, and suddenly felt an overwhelming need for sympathy. Between sobs and gasps for breath I then told her everything about Tony and me. "I - I feel so alone and s--so rejected." I added afterwards.

Mrs. O'Leary looked at the Christmas tree without really seeing it and murmured. "I know what you mean."

"N--No you don't. Y'--You can't"

"We all feel alone, at one time," Mrs. O'Leary explained slowly. "At your age, Lisa, we feel alone because we're trying to slowly break away from our families; we have to become independent people and be accepted by others. . . When things don't work out right; when others reject us, we feel failure."

"And you? In your case, instead of trying to break away from your family. . ."

"At my age, our families start to try to break away from us."

"Is that why your family put you in this home?" I whispered.

"That's part of it. At my age, you sort of expect it though."

"Oh," I sobbed in genuine sympathy. "How can you stand it?"

"It's all a part of life, Lisa, and there isn't one thing we can do about it."

"It still doesn't make me feel better about being rejected, I still feel. . . unwanted."

Mrs. O'Leary once again looked at the Christmas tree, this time regarding it thoughtfully. "I suppose that's how Mary and Joseph felt when none of the innkeeper's offered to take them in."

"This," I said suddenly, "Is a

cruel world."

"No, just unfair and difficult at times, but I don't think cruel's the word for it." She paused and then went on. "I know you're upset about your boyfriend, but you're still very lucky. You still have your family, your friends. . . and us."

I watched as several patients, finished with their breakfasts, wheeled themselves or walked themselves with canes from the direction of the cafeteria. As I watched the white faces of the men and women, many who would have no relatives visiting them over the holidays. I saw what Mrs. O'Leary said was true. I was very lucky.

"What about them. . . and you?" I whispered to her.

"Well, most of us have families--usually far away. But unfortunately we're often forgotten during the holidays."

I suddenly saw my job in a new perspective, and immediately began making plans to spend more time with each of the individual patients as I worked through part of my Christmas holidays. Keeping busy might also help me to forget more quickly; by helping others, I could perhaps gain new insight into helping myself as well.

I suddenly found, to my joy, that I had gained something of the true Christmas spirit, and it was welcome. I felt needed.

I looked at Mrs. O'Leary. "Thanks," I whispered, "Thank you so much. You've helped me a great deal."

As Mrs. O'Leary smiled and nodded, I suddenly recalled the green sweater I'd knitted for Tony as his Christmas gift from me. As I measured her with my eyes, I tried to calculate the altering I'd have to do on the project, and stood up, smiling.

"I'll have to get back to work now, Mrs. O'Leary," I said. "Bye now," I began to leave, but then turned and added, "Mrs. O'Leary?"

The elderly woman wheeled herself closer to me in her chair and said, "Yes?"

"What's your favorite color?"

A smile lifted her face playfully. "Why, I'm Irish, dear, remember? What else but green?"

A glow warmed me as I said, "In that case, I think that you'll like your Christmas gift from me very much . . .Merry Christmas, Mrs. O'Leary!"

*****

Jennifer Hunt

Swish! Swish!

Swish! Swish!
The cat's tail
slashes through
the grass while
stalking to prey
Mouse! Pounce!
Swish!

Julie O'Connell

This Story Has No Title

It's funny, she thought, how her first impression of him was also her last.

School had started only one week ago so she wasn't tired of it yet. But she knew she would grow to dislike it, so when the chance to leave the small college town for a weekend came up, she grabbed at it. The local radio station had announced that a student was looking for a rider to Chicago for the Labor Day weekend.

They arrived over an hour late. She hated waiting for anyone. Now she recognized Brad, the driver. He worked at the school radio station. That angered her further. Everyone knew the d.j.'s there were "pot heads" and "professional students". He had a bad complexion and a bad mouth. The other rider's name was Jon. He wore glasses and had a big nose. "Birds of a feather," she thought. They drove to pick up yet another rider. She was sitting in the back seat next to a cooler and Jon turned around and tried to start up a conversation. He was definitely interested but tried too hard. She answered his questions but offered no more information. The next rider, Eric, wore a headband around his long blonde hair. "What have I gotten myself into?" she wondered.

As they sped onto the highway Brad and Jon asked her to open up the cooler and hand them a beer.

"Take one," Brad said.

"No thanks," she replied.

Then Jon lit up a joint and passed it around.

"No thanks," she said again.

"This is just great" she thought. "All we need is to get pulled over by a cop for speeding."

The drive seemed to take forever.

The three friends reminisced about partying and buying dope in Mexico.

Slamming the front door of her home, she yelled "What a bunch of jerks." But now she was relieved to be home and her temper cooled as she chatted with her older sister.

It was getting late when they arrived back at school. Brad had brought back a carload of junk so Jon gave her a ride to her place in his own car so Brad could start unloading.

Jon seemed like a decent person today; not like the jerk she first met.

He carried her suitcase inside and continued talking while copying down her phone number. Usually she would have been angered at such audacity, but tonight it seemed funny.

"What makes this guy think I'd even want to go out with him?" she thought. "Oh well, I'll just say no anyway."

She was working on homework at the kitchen table when the phone rang. It wasn't surprising to hear it was Jon. What surprised her was hearing herself

say "yes" to a Friday night dinner date.

After she hung up she wondered why she had said yes.

He arrived promptly and she was disappointed to see he was wearing his glasses, which sat crooked on his big nose. Was she hoping he would look better without them?

He had made lasagne and poured red wine into champagne glasses. They sat facing each other perched on bar stools at a rough wooden bar.

He told her the story of how he and his roommate stole the wood for the bar from a construction site.

After dinner, they sat on the couch talking and drinking wine. There was a pause in the conversation and he turned and started kissing her. Big, wet, sloppy kisses. When he finally stopped, she felt like wiping her face with her hand but resisted the impulse.

He had swim practice early the next morning so he brought her home before the evening was very late.

"He's nice," she thought. "I hope to see him again."

She was surprised when he called just one day later and wanted to play tennis. They met at the courts and had only played a short while when he wanted to quit and have a talk.

They walked through the park and sat under a tree by the pond. He said he felt there was something really special between them. She was silent but her mind clicked away.

"How about some feedback?" he said.

She hadn't expected this. She wanted to continue seeing him but wasn't sure of her feelings yet and told him this.

He started kissing her and slowly pushed her back till she was lying in the grass with him on top.

"This is ridiculous," she thought. "We're in a public park in the middle of a Sunday afternoon."

She pulled away from his sloppy kisses and sat up again.

She and a friend had just left a party when she spotted Jon's beat up old Cutlass. She hopped out at the next corner and ran to his window. He and a friend were driving around drinking and smoking dope. He would meet her back at his place.

They went to his room. There was a mattress on the floor and numerous bean bag chairs. She chose a bean bag and he sat in one next to her. After awhile he moved to the same one with her and started kissing her and pressing his body on hers.

She wished he wouldn't be so physical so she didn't stay too long.

The next night they went to a fraternity party. It was hot and they danced most of the night.

"Let's go swimming," he said.

"Where are we going to go at this hour?"

"Over at the school pool. I know how to get in."

She felt like being a little crazy so they drove over to the gym and snuck in a back door. She stuck a toe in the water and walked around the pool. She looked up to see Jon hop naked onto the diving board and splash into the water.

She hadn't thought too much about it before now, but now she realized what this was leading up to. She hesitantly started taking off her clothes. She had slept with some of her boyfriends in high school and college, but was never comfortable being seen naked. While Jon went off the diving boards she floated on her back in the shallow end. She didn't particularly care to see naked men either.

He snuck up underwater and grabbed her and they laughed and splashed around.

They went into the locker room and stood under a hot shower kissing. For once she didn't mind his sloppy kisses. The warmth of the water and his body, the few drinks she had had, and the apprehension that they could get caught all made it seem nice and exciting.

They got dried off and dressed and headed to her place.

Jon spent the night that evening, and every night after that. It followed naturally that he should move in with her. He even promised he would quit smoking dope.

They bought a water bed and built the frame. They built shelves for his junk. They played tennis, racquetball, went bike riding, went to football games and concerts, cooked out in the park, did their homework and studied.

When the semester ended, they headed to their respective homes for Christmas vacation.

She had only been home one day when her sister asked her to go to a bar in a nearby small town. They had only been there a short while when they were asked if they would join two young men at the other end of the bar. She started to say "no" but her sister had already agreed. She tried to ignore the blonde man with a moustache that s sat next to her. He kept talking and she eventually got interested in the conversation. He was tall and well built and had deep blue eyes. His name was Mark and his friend was Bruce.

They all decided to go out to breakfast after the bar closed. The next day Mark called and would pick up her and her sister. Of course, he would bring a friend.

They went bowling and then to his apartment to play electronic TV games. They had a fun time even though she felt a little childish.

Mark lightly kissed her good night and said he hoped to see her again.

The next day Jon called. He had arranged for them to go skiing in Wisconsin for a week. They left late that night and arrived early the next

morning.

Before she met Mark she had decided to marry Jon. But now things had changed. Mark wasn't that important to her. He was nice and fun to be around, but he wasn't Mr. Right. What he made her realize was that she was too young to be "promised" to someone. She still wanted to date other men. More than one man found her desirable.

She knew better then to tell him this all at once. She worked around to dropping a hint, so the suggestion was planted in his mind.

Everything Jon did that week grated on her nerves. She couldn't stand his sloppy kisses and rejected his advances at night. She was bitchy and wished she'd never come skiing.

Each night she brought up the subject of breaking up.

She didn't think he was getting the message when one morning he asked her to marry him.

"No," she said. "School comes first. You know that."

He had known the answer before he asked, so why had he bothered?

She was glad to finally be back in Chicago and away from Jon. She avoided him and went out with Mark.

Jon returned to school early for swim practices and a meet.

She dreaded returning to school. How was she going to get rid of someone she had loved and lived with?

When she arrived she was amazed to find the place spotless and fresh flowers in a vase on the table.

Jon act3d like things hadn't changed between them. She stood motionless with her arms at her side as he hugged and kissed her. His big, wet sloppy kisses disgusted her and she wiped her face with her hand. She pushed him away and mumbled that she was tired after the long drive and wanted to unpack her car.

That night she clung to the edge of the water bed and acted like an icicle toward Jon's advances. After another two days she couldn't take it any longer. She told him she didn't love him anymore and wanted him to move out.

They fought and screamed at each other most of that night and the next day. He refused to move out. He told her how he had lied to her many times and she had believed him. He had stolen many of the things he had and had never quit smoking dope at all. He told her how the large dents in his car were from when he hit a parked car and left the scene of the accident. He called her names and shouted obscenities.

Finally she was left with no alternative than to call his father and ask him to intervene. Jon feared his father and agreed to move out.

She helped him move out, she was that glad to be getting rid of him.

This Story Has No Title (cont'd)

For weeks afterwards she received sarcastic, insulting letters and phone calls from Jon.

He would regret everything that he had said. He had never stopped loving her and was only lashing out because of the deep hurt he felt.

She was right. He soon began stopping by, hoping to still be friends. He often cried. It disgusted her to watch him cry. He whimpered like a child. It made her angry, not sympathetic.

The damage was done. He had hurt her with his lies, making a fool of her. Yet he claimed that he loved her and would never lie again. How could she be expected to believe that?

She refused to see him or talk to him anymore. She wanted no more of his tears or promises.

Later in the semester, she heard that Jon was talking about her around the campus.

After everything they had been through, she thought it was funny how her first impression of him was also her last.

*****

Pat Bohler

Nancy
Wife of John

Her spirit rides my thoughts, prodding my search.
for the essence of her warmth.
From her grave does the Violet nod to tell me of
her frolic through Tidewater Springs?
And from the Oak does the Robin's song accompany
her dance through Bluegrass Summers?
Does the Brook now murmur secrets of her love
that flowed through Prairie Autumns?
And do the bitter winds tell of her flight
through desolate winters?
I've sought the warmth of this Nancy, Wife of
John and I found her in the seasons.
I've fingered the weathered stone above her fragile
bones and I have loved her.
Life giving as the earth that claimed her.
Eternally lost but for the stone that names her.

*****

Karen Peterson

Then How?

We could write a story
Very dark and awfully gory,
To flush the ughlies out,
We even could shout.
Or we could sneer and be mean
And noisily steam
Ranting and raving
No anger saving
'Til we're all flushed out
There would be no doubt.

Then when our anger was gone,
We could sit down and yawn,
Thrust a gaze upon the rubble,
And many a popped bubble.
This gargantious mess
Would leave us depressed
And the ughlies would begin
We'd just have to do it again.

Julie O'Connell

Dreams

Soaring high like kites
Waiting for reality
Summer dreams glide by

Dreams are fantasies
Held tight in midnight secrets
Longing to come true

Like hearts deep in love
Dreams are shattered and broken
'Til spring sun shines through

Dreams are people's toys
Played with until they are worn
Then replaced by new

Dreams are butterflies
Fluttering through summer trees
Leaving memories

Dreams are aging books
Opened again and again
As winter creeps by.

*****

J. D. Guse

Flowing Rivers

Flowing Rivers
from factories defecated
waste.
Bring my thoughts to
yesterday.
Swimming,
Playing,
Fishing,
for that great unknown
hope,
from clear blue depths that have now
disappeared,
from factories defecated
waste,
in
Flowing Rivers.

*****

Marsha Kline

The Lodge

Rachel swung around quickly, her long blonde hair flying in all directions. Her face was fixed in a questioning expression. In an instant she surveyed the contents of the tiny room.

An old, dust-laden pine bureau stood against the east wall. The porcelain knobs were missing on both the top and bottom drawers. The third drawer fit in a rather cock-eyed manner, so that even when the drawer was closed, it wasn't. The blue-striped wallpaper behind the bureau had long since faded to a dull gray sameness. High above the bureau, cobwebs hung conspicuously from each corner of the room. The once white ceiling was now a dirty yellow. To the right of the bureau, Rachel caught a glimpse of an untouched brass bed.

The quilt that covered the sagging mattress was the work of an artist. Each swatch had been tediously stitched to form a beautiful coverlet. Years had passed now, since the quilt had been placed upon this bed, but its beauty aroused in Rachel an unsettling sense of familiarity.

Rachel was not sure why she was here in this musty old room, nor was she sure just what brought her here today.

Earlier, that sunny June morning in 1978, Rachel had suggested to Brad that they drive around the lake just one last time before they packed up their camping gear and headed back to city life.

As they approached a heavily wooded area to the north of the lake, Rachel's eye was drawn toward a sandy overgrown trail that once may have been traveled by horses or more recently, perhaps, an occasional car.

"Look, Brad - an old road. Let's explore a little! The jeep will make it."

"Aw, c'mon, Rachel. It looks rather forbidding. Besides, we don't have a lot of gas."

"Brad, please. Just a little way. Then we'll head back," Rachel pleaded.

"Alright. Let's make it quick then."

Brad turned the jeep onto the old road. The vehicle jolted along at a snails pace through the weeds, bouncing over buried rocks and branches. They wound around until the woods stretched out on all sides of them. Tree branches seemed to be closing in on them as Brad's nervousness became apparent.

"Now look, Rachel. This is getting a bit ridiculous. How can we even turn the jeep around? We can't back out either. We must be nearly a mile from the main road," Brad snapped anxiously.

"Brad, where's your sense of adventure, anyway? I have a feeling we'll come to an opening soon. Let's go just a little farther."

The Lodge (cont'd)

The trees cleared as they rounded the next curve, revealing a mammoth old structure.

"Look Brad! A lodge. We've found a lodge!"

Brad brought the jeep to a halt in an area where the weeds didn't quite reach the running board. Before the jeep had actually stopped, Rachel leaped out and ran toward the forbidding old lodge.

"Rachel, get back here. Where in the world are you going?"

But, Rachel disappeared through a large old entryway.

Brad jumped from the jeep and ran toward the lodge. As he entered the doorway, he stepped into a dark dusty foyer with an ancient winding stairway. Just ahead, he noticed a large lobby still furnished with its original furniture, which was now very antique. Several other rooms were arranged around the lobby. A formal dining room lay off to the side. Next to the dining room, Brad noted a great old library with thousands of books lining every inch of all four walls.

Rachel was nowhere to be found. Brad called but there was no answer, other than his own voice as it echoed back around the lobby. He wandered around aimlessly before deciding to climb the staircase. Each stair creaked loudly under his steps. The eeriness should have been enough to turn any man away.

Brad wondered why Rachel had not been afraid. What - if anything - could have drawn her into this place? She hadn't even waited for him. She had disappeared so quickly; it was almost as if she knew just where she was going.

At the top of the stairs several hallways stretched out like road maps before him. The hallway to the East seemed to have a window near the end, as some source of light was detectable.

Brad walked quickly now, calling as he passed each closed door. After trying the knobs on the first few doors, Brad realized that they were all locked.

He picked up his pace, until he broke into a run. The hallway was growing a little brighter now. However, the source of light appeared to be coming from a room rather than a window. Brad stopped dead in his tracks as he reached the end of the hall. A door was opened and the sun that shone through the window of the tiny room overflowed into the hall.

Rachel was sitting on an old brass bed gently fingering a beautiful quilt. Her eyes were fixed upon the stitching in the quilt. The expression on her face was one of utter tranquility.

"Rachel, My God, why did you run off on me? I was so worried about you."

Rachel's expression didn't change. She did not respond to Brad's presence.

"Rachel. What are you doing here?" Brad pleaded desperately searching for

The Lodge (cont'd)

some explanation.

Rachel did not answer. Ten years of another life-time were flashing through her mind like dreams. Suddenly, she knew why she was here. The surroundings were painfully familiar now. Her father had owned this lodge before he died in 1861. Rachel was ten years old then. She remembered how she had begged and pleaded with her mother to keep the lodge open. She loved it here. She loved the freedom, the seclusion and the quiet privacy that the lodge offered. She loved the friendly people who were regular visitors. She loved the birds, the wild animals, the flowers and the wind in the trees. She loved the various activities that life at the lodge offered.

Despite her pleadings, the lodge was boarded up and she was never allowed to return. Rachel, her mother and her grandmother were whisked off to the city to live with Aunt Sarah and Uncle Ben. Rachel developed pneumonia and died of complications the following winter.

Now, remembering her dying wish, Rachel knew she would someday return to the lodge.

*****

Marge Peterson

Thoughts of Freedom From the Kitchen

You sit in the kitchen
and your fingers are itchin'
To do something new.
You're feeling so blue
For a clean house is nice
And so is cooked rice
But the effort is lost
With one careless toss
Of this thing and that,
A lunch box and a hat,
Papers, popcorn and rocks
Soon up to your socks.
I wish I could sing
With a happy ring.
I'd sing in the rain
And eat sugar cane,
Hop up a big tree
and buzz with a bee.
I'd swing from a limb
'Till the light had gone dim.
When your slicing the Bree
You don't feel free.

*****

Judy Belfield

I'm Catchin the First Bus Outta Here

I'm catchin the first bus outta here
and headin for the stars.
Now, I don't know
if Greyhound goes there;
if it's a regular route
or a special run
that's gotta be arranged,
but I'm goin just the same
and I don't want no company.
I'll call em on the telephone
and say I want the Skyline Tour --
no chauffeur --
I'll drive myself, thank you.
I'll be there
at ten of six
with my bags crammed full
of pretzel sticks
and cigarettes
and whatever booze I'll need
for the next few years
Cause I'm gettin outta here
while the gettin's good
and the stars still shine.
I ain't twenty-nine
no more:
It's gettin late
and I can't handle
this mad, mad, mad, mad, mad--
well, you know.
So au revoir, so long, good-bye;
The time to leave is drawing nigh --
neigh, nay, ni-nee-no,
hi-ho
time to go --
and please forget to write.

*****

Maureen Whitmer

Joy Ride

Millions of light-years away in a galaxy known on earth as NGC 5128 school was in session on the planet Celt for boys entering the ranks of Taul Ceti Legionnaires. The school was a vigorous six year training camp to teach the disciplined ways of the Taul Ceti.

The boys in this particular class, fifteen of them in all, were starting their days training in Taul Ceti meditation rituals to open their minds to accommodate higher and higher levels of learning. Each boy was sitting on the open grounds with their eyes closed tilted upward to the sky, while an old Taul Ceti teacher walked among their rows carefully checking vital signs to be sure each boy was fully responding.

The old teacher was of the Eisterion race, founders of Taul Ceti. They were a proud race dating back billions of years, possibly as far back as time itself. The old Eisterion looked proudly at his pupils. He had much to be proud of. Thirteen of them were also Elsterions characterized by a bluish pallor of the skin and yellowish almond eyes. Taul Ceti welcomed all peaceful races and the teacher was happy to have a Carean and an Insetus amid their numbers.

The teacher eyed the Carean and the shy Insetus boys who were becoming close friends.

"Things like that happen," he thought. "Two races so different, so all alone, yet see how they attract to each other like magnets."

He looked at Joal the Carean and thought, "We are lucky to have one of his kind. They are so bold, intelligent, daring, and golden like a fabled god."

Careans were one of the most handsome creatures in the galaxy, not only because of their pleasing looks but because of an aura of goodness that glowed from them.

A smile spread across the teacher's lips as his eyes moved to Palan, the little Insetus with big green eyes, skin so white it seemed translucent, hair fine and transparent, and little antennae peering out from behind either ear.

"How his race understands nature and respects life," the teacher thought. "He seems so young and small, but they have assured me he was ready to start the training. He's lucky to find a friend like Joal."

The teacher's thoughts returned to the class and with one sharp clap of his hands the meditation was broken. The boys rose brushing dust from their robes recalling their senses in the mid-day air. The class was over. The boys began to disperse except for two, Joal and Palan. The old Eisterion noticed them standing and walked up to

them glad he had the opportunity to see them alone.

"I suppose you two have mastered the art of Ceti meditation," he said with an air of humor in his voice.

Joal looked up to him smiling while the Insetus seemed somewhat distressed.

"What is it Palan?" he asked noticing the boys distress.

"I was wondering...I was wondering when we change barracks will I be able to keep Munif?" He held Munif, a little beast looking like a dragon with wings, in his hands.

"Of course, you can keep him. Where else would poor Munif go on this planet," the Eisterion answered, but then added, "But to keep him in your room you are going to need an agreement slip from your new roommate." He turned to Joal. "Joal, do you want to sign it now or later?"

The boys eyes met in a happy but surprised gaze.

"I'll sign it now, Sir. Palan, we'll be rooming together, just you, Munif, and me!" Joal said excitedly while putting an arm around his companions shoulders.

In the days that followed the boys moved from their open bay barracks to their new rooms for they were now Ceti Guardsmen. They would soon be working right along side a Taul Ceti Legionnaire learning his ways while serving him dutifully.

Joal and Palan had been attracted to each other from the start and their friendship grew in the days that followed.

When they returned to their room at night they would talk of the conquests their Legionnaire's had performed in far away galaxies. They would talk of the dreams they had for their own lives. They made a vow to each other never to be separated no matter where the Taul Ceti would take them.

On Earth a simple but whole hearted ceremony was taking place in the mid-Atlantic Ocean. Assorted dignitaries along with some press had gathered to witness the sinking of many military ships heavily laden with weapons, most of which were the menacing nuclear bombs. It was a ceremony filled with much rejoicing as each ship went down slowly at first then nose-diving and sinking quickly into the ocean depths. There were acts such as this going on everywhere. Military bases were being torn down, armories were being emptied, and military air and ground equipment was being dismantled. All of this was being sponsored by the DAWS Treaty. There would be world peace.

Joal was standing duty that day as he did every fifth day of the month. This particular day he was standing duty at the Taul Ceti Fleet Station having been assigned some simple tasks at the docks. One of which was to get a Stel-

ler Cruiser ready for a patrol. He was checking out some of the controls when Palan joined him.

"Hello Joal, pulling the duty again?" Palan asked.

"Yes. I've got to get this cruiser ready for a patrol by mid-morning," Joal stated while eyeing Munif, the little beast crawling about his companion's shoulders. "I'm almost finished...I've just got to take her out for a navagational check. Do you want to come along?"

"Yes...that is if it's all right? You won't get in any kind of trouble for having me aboard, will you?" Palan asked a little uncertainly.

"Not unless you say I kidnapped you!" he teased. "Come on Palan, this will be fun."

"All right, if you're sure it's OK."

"I'm sure," he said while helping Palan aboard the vessel. "Besides," he added, "this ship is much easier to operate with a second controlman."

The boys climbed into the ships seating themselves on either side of the control center. They proceeded to get the cruiser underway. Joal started the ship with an incredibly loud hissing, roaring, rumbling sound.

Palan's eyes widened and he said to his little pet, "This is going to be some ride Munif, you better hang on tight."

Munif made a kind of chirping sound as if able to understand him.

"What do you mean," Joal stated. "I was one of the best in flight training."

With those words the cruiser departed at an astonishing speed. Joal, however, was able to get the vessel under control after a few seconds.

"There now that wasn't so bad," Joal said while glancing over at Palan who looked a bit ill. "You all right?" Joal asked.

"As soon as my heart returns to my chest. I think it's somewhere on the ceiling," Palan said half teasing half serious, while Munif made strange high chirping sounds as if scolding Joal.

The two boys broke into laughter and Joal asked in the most respectable voice he could muster, "Where would you like to be escorted to, Sir?"

Palan, amused, deepened his voice as best he could and answered; "Once around the galaxy should be sufficient, guardsman."

"Here we go," Joal said as he accelerated the ship nearer to top speeds.

"Do you have on your deflector shields? I don't want to collide with any stars."

"Of course they're on. You wouldn't believe how fast this cruiser can go. Watch this," Joal said while pushing the ship to even faster speeds.

Joy Ride (cont'd)

"Joal aren't we supposed to be checking the navigation system?"

"Gosh, I almost forgot...hey the navigator's not working!" Joal said while slowing the ship down suddenly to a Celt-snails pace.

"You're lucky to have brought me along," Palan said while rising from his seat knowing what must be done next. "I'll get us back. I know this galaxy like the back of my hand."

He placed some maps out on a counter and turned the surveying screen to estimate where they were. He quietly viewed the maps while Joal observed from a distance.

"Lords of Celt!" Palan finally exclaimed. "I can't believe how far out we are."

Munif bristled at his yell, while Joal moved closer for a better look.

"We are here," Palan said while pointing to a spiral galaxy no more than fifteen million light-years from their own. "I'll manually reset the navigational system," he said while proceeding to do the task.

"I really had this ship moving," Joal said then added, "Say, I've never been out this way before. What would you think of a little exploring?"

"Well, maybe just for a little while," Palan answered, his curiosity getting the best of him.

"This is fun," Joal remarked while adjusting the surveying screen to observe anything that might be worth exploring.

"Now here is something interesting," Joal said spotting a solar system in the huge screen.

"I'll adjust the soom and pull it into focus. Will you look at that giant gasseous planet," Joal said while further adjusting the screen.

"There's another one and it's red ...there's seven...nine planets and one is blue like Celt."

"It is," Palan remarked. "Only it looks almost completely covered with water and there seems to be some kind of strange haze around it...or is it glowing from it? I wonder what that could be?"

"I don't know...Say that planet would make a perfect target. Do you think you could drive an energy bolt between those land masses on it?" Joal asked enticingly.

"I'm sure I could, but there's probably some type of life on it and I wouldn't want to hurt anything."

"Since when did an energy bolt ever hurt anything living?"

"That's not what I meant, Joal, I mean hurting by changing the environment."

"I'll bet you're just not sure of your aim," Joal said with a hint of sarcasm in his voice.

Palan's eyes met his as he said, "We'll see who has the better aim. You fire first."

Joy Ride (cont'd)

"All right," said Joal while he adjusted the blue planet to the center of the screen.

He aimed firing two energy bolts into the Pacific Ocean. The bolts hit near the coast of California causing a most amazing effect on the Earth, but impossible to notice from the ship.

When the bolts hit the coast as if by some magical force it lit up like a Christmas tree even though power had been out since the war. Boats in the harbors suddenly started, dormant lighthouses suddenly went frantic sending their beams everywhere, and bridges began functioning for no apparent reason. Electrical appliances began working without any electricity. Coffee pots were percolating, toasters were toasting, blenders were blending, and microwave ovens were cooking.

"Not a very good hit," Palan commented while taking aim on the center of the Atlantic Ocean.

The energy bolt hit the water spreading an energy field that affected everything in reach including a ship load of nuclear bombs lying on a fault of the Atlantic floor.

The effects were catastrophic. The boys watched in awe as the Earth cracked open like an egg, spilling its contents into the atmosphere, while losing its gravity, letting go of its moon, and casting its oceans and seas into space. After what seemed to be hours the only remnant left was an asteroid belt made up of Earthen rock and ice revolving where the Earth had once been.

There would never again be war on Earth.

*****

Ruth Reynolds

She Calls Collect

She sings demands a thousand miles
such hollow notes.
Shrill.
ears bust from listening
Just answer her questions
No need to talk.

Fat flabby folds
hang from her arms.
Veins burst open her legs
Ankles, blown baloons -
toes torn crooked.
Her breasts over belly over belly.
just so much skin.
those beady eyes
and frizzy yellow hair.

She usually
feels lousy.
body always ailing
but mind not slipping
thoughts cascade like
water down a damn.
Cooks for days
lobster to quiche
to matzoh, to pie.

She Calls Collect (cont'd)

A good jew.
On holidays.
She tires
rests.
Talks of those she once knew
Introduces herself to those
she doesn't.
most friends have died
before her.

A friend of Freidan
A giver to NOW.
Campaigned for Kennedy.
Supported Grasso.
writes her senator daily
the N.Y. Times her only lover,
front to back each day.
her vocabulary extensive,
her vision afar.

Her family she treasures
the children
their youth.
her advice
flows freely,
She cares
She does
She loves.

*****

Judy Belfield

Strawberry Season

A black El Camino passed through an opening in a high limestone wall just as the sun was beginning to peek over the horizon. The shiny mini-truck threaded its way around a crazily winding road, arriving at a long black-topped snake that stretched through miles of flat, black earth. After a few miles, that flat earth became crowded with rows and rows of tall corn.

The occupants of the vehicle were a gray-haired man in coveralls with a few too many inches girth, and a thin, wiry, sleepy-eyed younger man of about thirty-five. They traveled in silence for quite a while and then the older began to speak, almost as if his son weren't there.

"Comes a time in a man's life when he's got to get out from under all those dreams he had when he was a young man. Face up to the real world. Make your peace with it and try to get along as best you can."

The younger man didn't answer right away. He wondered what motivated the old man to say what he had. Why was he, all of a sudden, talking about dreams? What did dreams have to do with anything?

It soon became clear to the son what his father was doing. The old man was trying to shake him loose again. He was nervous, didn't know what to say to his son, and so, started in on his worn-out monologue regarding the merits of down-to-earth thinking. It disturbed the young man, as it always did, being put on the defensive this way, but he

was determined not to get angry. He was determined not to get into the same old argument that never got anywhere.

"Didn't you have any dreams when you were young, Dad?"

"Sure. Had lots of 'em . . . lots of 'em. I don't think about 'em much any mores. Don't do no good. They ain't time for 'em. Got to go about livin'. Aint no time for dreams."

"Why would anyone want to give up his dreams just because there's no time for them? A man's got to make time. Make time for them to happen too. There's got to be something to hope for, else, what's the point of living?"

"Well, I guess that comes a not ever havin' ta want for anythin'. They that's never had to break their backs to feed a housefulla kids just caint 'prēciate what it means to hafta give up somma them dreams. Ya gotta sacrifice in this world, son . . . give up somethin' ya wants, and prob'ly'll never get anyways, for somethin' ya gotta have ta live.

"Lookit me. Worked at the John Deere all these years just like my Dad before me. Ya think that's what I wanted when I was young? Nossir. I'da liked to finish high school, but I had to help at home. Had to go to work . . . "

"Here it comes," thought the son. Now he was going to have to listen to it again.

"Turn on the radio, will you Dad?"

Clarence Eversmann reached down to the dial and turned it clockwise. His sixty-five-year-old hands were sprinkled with liver spots and hardened with callouses. He had wanted to talk more to his youngest son, but, evidently, Billy didn't want to talk. Billy never wanted to talk to him about anything important. Whenever Clarence tried to talk about the only sensible way to live in this world, Billy just changed the subject or walked away or created a diversion of some kind. Today it was the radio. It was always something. They just never could talk. They lived in two unrelated worlds.

"How could it have happened?" Clarence asked himself. "This son who came from somewhere inside his body. He might just as well have been a stranger."

He'd always been a stranger. Billy was never like his brothers and sisters. Clarence knew he was different right off the bat. The kid didn't mix well; he didn't talk much; stayed so much to himself daydreaming his life away. And then, those schools put all those high-falutin' ideas into his head. The kid wanted to write. Write! Imagine! And he didn't want to write for a newspaper and make some money with his writing. No -- he wanted to write books, had already written three or four, and those sat home collecting dust. Nobody wanted

Strawberry Season (cont'd)

to buy them. What good were they? Clarence couldn't understand why the kid hadn't given up in all this time -- he was thirty-five years old! He ought to have come out of that cloud he'd fluffed up for himself in the air. What was wrong with kids today? Clarence knew the answer to that question, of course -- kids today just had things too easy. They never had to worry about where the next meal was coming from. When Clarence was young, he'd never had time for what these fancy pants psychiatrists called "psychoses." He'd been too busy helping to support his dad's family and then gone on to support his own. That's what these kids needed -- to get their hands dirty, some good hard work; keep their idle minds busy.

Billy drew a deep puff on his cigarette and watched the smoke swirl inside the car. He wondered why Dad had to start harping at him today. Couldn't he see that it never got anywhere? Wasn't Dad ever going to learn that this oft-repeated conversation was a stalemate from the beginning? No, Billy thought, Dad would never change. He'd just keep plowing the same rut year after year. It was a shame, somehow. Billy wondered if, when Dad died, he'd go out of this world happy, if that narrow world of his were really enough for him.

"Dad . . ."

"Yeah?"

"Dad . . . are you happy?"

"Well now, what kind of a fool question is that? 'Course I'm happy."

"Why are you happy, Dad?"

"Well now, why shoudn' I be? I worked hard all my life. I raised five healthy kids, gave 'em all the best I could. Had the sweetest little woman on earth for a wife, God rest her soul, and now I'm retired, I got a nice little garden to take care of, a roof over my head, no bills ta speak of. I don't want for nothin'. I pret' near do everythin' I want to. What more could anybody ask?"

That was it. The sum-total of Clarence Eversmann's life: What more could anybody ask! Take what you worked for and be happy with what you got. Was that the key to life? It troubled Billy. He thought that he'd been cheated out of his Dad's simplicity. It bothered him greatly that Dad could be content with what seemed like so little to him. Billy wanted desperately to be content. He wondered -- worried -- that he never would be. How did Dad learn to be happy? How did anyone?

"Billy, did I ever tell you about the time I lost a whole paycheck playin' poker?"

"Yes, Dad, many times."

"Well, ya see, there was this time when Jacob Ettinger started ta braggin' he could beat us all outta our pants an' we figgered we'd jus' show him a thing or two . . ."

Billy's mind drifted. His eyes embraced the cool, pink, morning sky. It would be hot today and the mornings were

fresh, untouched as yet by the cruel heat of summer afternoon sun. There weren't many cars on the road and that was nice. They had the whole world to themselves. The corn in the fields was tall and green and wet with dew. The moist, black earth teemed with unseen activity. That black Iowa earth, those green rows of August corn, that shimmery pink and blue sky! It was a shame they had to get anywhere. Billy thought he might have been able to ride in the car forever. But they were going home.

Billy thought about the strawberries that Dad used to grow behind the house and how Mike and Dorothy and Alice and Virginia and he would race to that patch after a rain shower and pluck the big, wet berries off the vines and plop them into their mouths as though the strawberries would never end. He wished he could do it right now. His mouth watered as he imagined himself biting into one. He remembered the giggles of all the kids out back behind the house, their fingers stained red, their mouths dripping. And then they'd argue about who had eaten the most. The fights and the giggles were constant. He missed them -- the giggles, the fights, the kids, the strawberries. Most of all, he missed being a child. Missed it sorely. He ached now with an impossible pain.

"Dad . . . Dad . . .," he pleaded silently. "Where did it all go? How did it get away so quickly? What happened to all your brown hair? And the tonic you used to put on it? What happened to the years?

"You never think about them, do you? You go back only to relive pieces of time that you've repeated so many times, they no longer have any meaning to you. Remember the strawberries, Dad?

"Remember the August afternoon I tried out Dorothy's rollerskates and sprained my arm? Remember the rain that sprayed the yard that day? I can still smell it in the grass. I can still feel the sunshine drying my hair. I remember wearing Mike's jeans to play baseball with you in the empty field -- I had to roll them up what seemed like a dozen times. Mike was so tall then. He had such a big Adam's apple in his scrawny neck. Would you have watched him any more carefully then, if you had known that the man he was growing into would be the same one who was later to crash ehad-on into that semi? Would you have studied him more closely? Memorized him, maybe?

"Do you remember any of the little things, Dad? Like Mom not drying any of the dishes because Alice had told her that dishtowels were full of germs -- she'd learned that in a biology class.

"God, Dad, what happened to Mom? What happened to the brown oxfords and white anklets that were Mom? What

happened to the brown strands of hair flecked with flour that was Mom? Mom, whose skinny, freckled arms were forever in long sleeves that were rolled up. Mom, whose calf-length skirts were always covered by an apron. What happened to Mom? She passed in and out of our lives so quickly that we hardly had time to know her . . . Mom . . ."

Clarence had finished the Jacob Ettinger story and looked over at his son. Billy's mind was a million miles away. His face was contorted and his cheeks were wet with tears.

"Poor Billy," Clarence thought. "Poor Billy. We're never gonna git together. We're never gonna make it." Clarence's heart ached for him. He wondered where all the pain came from that tortured his boy. This kid was brought up just like all the rest. None of the others had problems. Clarence would never understand Billy. He'd tried, God knows, he'd tried, but Clarence figured maybe he just wasn't smart enough to understand, never would be.

"Whatsamatter, son?"

"I . . . I . . . I wanna go back."

"Back to the hospital?"

"Yeah . . . I . . . can't go home today. I can't. I'm sorry Dad, I'm sorry."

"It's okay, boy. It's okay." Clarence leaned across the seat and put his arms around his son. He gave him a quick, tight hug and then straightened himself back into the driver's seat. It was all he could think of to do.

"I'm sorry Dad."

"It's okay. One a these weeks we're gonna make it all the way home. An' when we do . . . well, when we do, why we're jus' gonna stay there forever."

"Dad?"

"Yeah?"

"Could we stop somewhere and get some strawberries on the way?"

*****

Pat Bohler

Nancy Wife of John II

I hear her ghostly whisper
moan from her sodded cell.

It comes now louder, crisper
she learned her lesson well.

"He took it all my daughter
and isn't it a shame.

He led me to the alter
he even stole my name."

*****

Jason Coleman

Yoga

Exuberance comes easy standing on your head.
The simple pleasure calms the senses;
numbs the muscles as if you were dead.
In the subconscious trance nerve tensions release;
heartbeat slows down approaching utter peace.

Hallucinations float in the retina of your eye.
The universe expands and then contracts;
until all knowledge of the cosmos makes you high.
An aura mystically protects the exhilarating soul;
Cross your legs, say a chant, and fulfill the goal.

*****

Rowena Youngblood

This Child Need Her Father

This child need her father, oh yes she do,
after all the hell and war she's been through,
when a father was needed it was nobody there,
nobody to comfort her, and nobody to care,
when she was down and full of doubt,
she reach out for her dad but he was out,
He's still out and he's gone forever,
one day with God help we'll be together,
she has "hope" you see,
and Right Now she needs her daddy.

She needs so bad there at home,
right there with her where he belong,
When she talks to him on the phone,
she starts to cry,
And I know he's beginning to wonder why,
The reason for that is she miss him so much,
and the phone call is the only thing to keep
them in touch,

Yes, she know things aren't the same, unless
he comes back there's more to change,
I would talk like to talk about Mom,
But I not gonna bother.
Because this child needs her father.

*****

Colleen Moloney

What To Do?

What do you do when you're empty?...

Jackson has stolen my heart-
without really knowing.

Pat is pulling on my arm...
pick you up at 5:00 or 5:30?

Chrissy steals all my hugs...
which she desperately needs.

What am I when everyone has a part of me?...
just a lost lonely soul
I need to be a whole- I need all my parts.

Giving is a wonderful pleasure- but if you
receive nothing in return you are drained-empty.
and ...

What do you do when you're empty?

Judy Belfield

It's Laundry-Roundup Time

It's laundry-roundup time
at the Bar B Corral:
gotta get the clothes washed
for another week of dirt,
so I can wash em again
and again
and--
well, you get the picture.
Gotta ferret out the herd --
these animals hide in strange places:
Socks under the couch,
under a chair,
in a crack in the wall;
Jeans in the john
under the hair
that was trimmed
from somebody's head
last Tuesday --
et cetera.
Gotta get em together somehow
and brand em
with "NEW" and "IMPROVED"
Brand X,
which may or may not be the high-priced spread --
"X, the Unknown!"
Gotta suds these duds
til they're red, white or green,
fresh and clean,
ready to wear and tear.
Get out the grease;
get out the mud;
get out the stains;
but first --
I gotta get out the lead.

*****

Cheryl Koniuszy

Z's Please

Just about once a month Dear Abby runs a letter in her column from a half-crazed wife complaining that her other-wise cherished husband is snoring her to death. For me that is a blessed sound, a sure indication that my beloved hubby is not going to be up to his nocturnal antics.

Frankly, I wonder at times just how a nice girl like me got stuck with a man whose brain works a 24 hour shift. At night the most work my mind does is to dream about ardent lovers, two weeks vacation with maid service and no kids, or finding Aladdin's lamp with the lid and three wishes still intact.

My husband, on the other hand, becomes a sleep walking and talking Steve Martin; a solver of world problems like Kissinger; even an adventurous pirate, or in general, a stranger in the darkness of our bedroom.

Over the years the stranger has not awakened me so often and I have learned a few things about his nature. One thing for sure, he is completely unaware of what he does in his sleep. In fact he thought I was crazy til his mother verified that indeed it was a problem even in his early childhood. The second thing is; he only

does it when he is worried or upset about something.

One night, not long after our honeymoon, I gently slid into bed with my sleeping husband only to be startled as he reached out for me and pulled me gently into his arms.

"Do you love me?" I asked quite sure he was still awake and had been waiting for me.

"Sure do." was his quiet reply.

"How come?" the anxious new bride asked, hoping for a dissertation of her good virtues.

"Because somebody has to." was his reply as he patted my head like a puppy dog and began to snore.

A few nights later I was rudely awakened by a jabbing finger in the middle of my back.

"This is a stick-up."

"Huh?" I said, not sure if I was dreaming.

"This is a stick-up." he repeated. "Give me all your money."

"You have all my money."

"I do?" he said quite seriously. "Ok."

And with that he laid the dangerous gun finger on his chest and began the deep snore I was beginning to welcome at night.

Usually I am the sole witness to these adventures, but once while visit-

ing my in-laws my husband decided to give a speech around three a.m. There he stood in T-shirt and jocky shorts in the hall giving the most elegant rags to riches speech. The speech lasted all of thirty minutes at which he ended with a bow and several thank-yous to the audience (Mom, Dad, and I). He even went back to bed all on his own, still nodding his head and smiling to the crowd (?).

I have tried just about everything the experts suggest to cure his night time adventures. Even waking him up doesn't work because he just starts all over later on that night. Getting to the root of the problem isn't easy, because even the most minor problems, me forgetting to pick up his favorite shirt at the laundry, or a call from his not so favorite mother-in-law, can set him off.

Today, he came home and announced over dinner that he was having problems at work....something that he just had to work out on his own. I announced that my daughter and I had been invited out of town for the next two nights to visit my sister. Give me a man that snores any night!

*****

Jennifer Hunt

Prisoner

I am a convict
locked inside myself forever.
My mind says one thing
my heart always another.
I would like to be beautiful and maybe even a star,
But I cannot for I am plain and just me.
I would like to go overseas,
sail in oceans, fly in the sky,
But I have not the transportation,
for this body that binds me.
When people see me they don't
They see the face, the eyes, and hands that
encase me.
They are looking at my own jailer.
And very few people
will I let look in,
let past my skin,
to the real me.
Yes, I am a lifer
Locked inside myself.

*****

Janet Valek

Small Advice

If you don't have anything to say
besides conceited talk,
pie in the sky talk,
cocky talk,
boorish talk,
play with my head talk,
then don't say anything.

*****

Judy Belfield

My Wit

My wit
is worn and old
and all the thoughts that brew
along with all the feelings too,
produce not one thing new,
or so I'm told:
I quit!

*****

Judy Belfield

Deadlock

Margie and I were having lunch together in a restaurant one day when the conversation turned to an evaluation of local bars and their respective patrons.

"I like to drink where people are real," said Margie.

"What is real?" I asked.

"Well, it certainly isn't at a place like the Chaz Club where everybody tries to outdo each other with fancy disco clothes and phony conversations."

"Maybe so," I said.

"And I hate Fred's and Ray's because all anybody ever goes into those places for is a piece of ass."

"I beg your pardon."

"You know what I mean. Every guy that goes into Fred's or Ray's thinks every check that enters is just dying to jump into bed with the first hot prospect."

"I don't believe that -- and I've been in both places millions of times."

"Well, I never met a guy in either place who didn't have sex on his mind and that was his prime motive for being there."

"C'mon now -- it's like that EVERYplace. I'd say sixty to eighty percent of all people who go to any bars -- and I'm speaking of 'singles'-- are looking for, if not sex, at least some kind of relationship."

"Well, I'm not looking for sex. I'm looking for a husband. I've been divorced for three years now and I'm lonely. That's why I go to Jimmy's Place. The people -- the guys -- are just there to drink and have a good time. They're not threatening."

"You're not gonna tell me that the guys who go into that place are all there to chat and laugh and that's it. C'mon . . . I've been in there -- and they're just as horny there as they are anywhere else," I said.

"But they know me there. They know I'm not there for a quick screw. I feel safe, because the people there are just down-to-earth types who don't try to be something they're not."

"Those down-to-earth types include Renegades?"

"Sure. Renegades come in once in a while. But they don't bother anybody. They sit at one end of the bar and everybody else sits at the other. There's never any trouble. Why are you always picking on them anyway? Some of the Renegades are all-right guys."

"Not in my book. They're criminals -- punks who think that belonging to a motorcycle gang whose members assault the rest of the world makes them men. They're sickening, filthy pigs who'd just as soon beat you up as look at you."

"You never met any. You don't know."

"That's right. And I don't particularly want to either. And I wouldn't go around bragging about it if I did."

Deadlock (cont'd)

"You can't judge all of them by a few."

"Yes I can. I can think anything I damn well please."

The discussion stalemated there. Neither of us would budge on our prejudices, so we sat silently for a while and then began to talk of other things.

Two weeks later my sister called to tell me that an ex-boyfriend of hers had been stabbed outside a bar by two members of the Renegades gang (or "club", if you will). Frank had a punctured kidney and wasn't expected to live.

The next time Margie and I were together, I told her about it. She'd already heard the story, but since my sister had witnessed the stabbing, I had inside information to give.

"Frank's a loud-mouth. He's always bad-mouthing the Renegades. He should know better than to say anything when they're around," she said. "He probably provoked it."

"I don't doubt that," I said. "But is that any reason he should have to die? What kind of a world is it where you have to be afraid to say something for fear you'll be stabbed? Frank wasn't carrying any weapon. He was very drunk at the time. And so -- because he got drunk and said something, he's probably going to die. If that's the way things are, I want off this planet and I want off now!"

Margie repeated her bit about how the Renegades came into Jimmy's Place all the time and there was never any trouble. Margie is the one who changed her story; I didn't alter it. At that first conversation, she had said that the Renegades came in "once and a while." Now she was saying, "all the time."

"People just have to learn to mind their own business," she said.

"When a man is stabbed, it is everyone's business to see that the person or persons who did the stabbing is/are removed from society. Killing -- or attempting to kill -- is almost never justified. I don't go around killing people who disagree with me and I expect everyone else to give me that same respect."

"Well, Frank didn't respect them when he said whatever it was he said to them."

"Maybe not, but words are a hell of a lot different than knives! I can't believe you're saying this. Those Renegades are uncivilized animals."

"That's not very charitable, you know."

"Death -- or near-death -- adds a new dimension to charity. There's no excuse for taking another person's life."

This conversation also came to a standstill. Margie couldn't convince me and I couldn't convince her. Since we both knew that neither of us was willing to make any concessions on this issue, we progressed into an area of discussion

that we knew was also a dead-end issue -- that of capital punishment. We must both have felt like arguing, because we know how we feel about capital punishment and we also know that we'll never change each other's minds. I guess it was a needling session. She proceeded to say that John Gacy should be strung up by the balls and I have her my old bit about murderers needing psychiatric help, or at least study, to prevent, or try to prevent, such acts from being repeated. Our discussions on the topic become nauseating through endless repetition and no points scored ever with one or the other of us.

Weeks later, Frank was in satisfactory condition and was expected to be sent home soon. I thought maybe I was too harsh on Jimmy's Place. I don't know -- maybe imminent death colors my judgments and with the threat gone, felt a bit safe. I'm not sure what motives I had in mind when I pulled up outside Jimmy's after spotting Margie's car at the corner.

It was near closing time when I walked in.

For those of you who are unfamiliar with closing time at bars these days, let me digress for a moment. Lights flicker or bells are rung. The bouncers, or, as in the case of Jimmy's Place, the owner and bartenders keep shouting, "We gotta go!" Most patrons are drunk, high, or both. For some, it is 'panic time': Grab a guy or a girl in the few minutes that are left. There is much noise, but there is no music. The bands have finished playing or the jukeboxes have been disconnected. The noise is human. People are laughing, yelling, talking, finishing up the last of their drinks. There is much moving around. There are those who stand outside the bars or sit on sidewalks. Some talk. Others are couples beginning what they intend to complete later in an apartment or in a car. It is a fascinating scene, really -- all these inebriated people being slowly, but surely, rounded up and corralled out. One hears protests here and there: "I'm going . . . I'm going," or "I just want to finish this and I'll go." Bartenders, owners and bouncers all have the same deadpan, bored look borne of the tedium of endless nights of emptying out their bars.

This was the situation when I arrived at Jimmy's. Several motorcycles were parked near the entrance. Guys in sleeveless denim jackets stood in clusters outside the door. I saw two with knives stuck in their belts. The word, "fuckin" was very big in their vocabularies -- it issued from practically every mouth. It seemed to be sprinkled between every other word.

An example: "Ya know what fuckin happened on my way fuckin here?"

"What, man?"

"Some fuckin . . ." etc. The

word stuccoes the night, blends in with no apostrophes and no particular notice. I noticed. I also noticed guys relieving themselves in bushes and at the sides of vans.

I walked inside, stood at the bar for about a minute and decided to leave. Margie was hanging on some guy I didn't know and I felt completely out of place -- not being drunk at closing time can do that to you.

Outside again, motorcycles were revving, crisscrossing each other in the intersection and pulling up onto the sidewalk. One guy had a bottle of beer in his teeth as he drove away. This might have looked like great fun if the participants in the spectacle had been halfway decent looking, but they weren't. There were a lot of tattooes around me -- I associate tattooes with Richard Speck and Perry Smith. I <u>can</u> associate tattooes with sailors too, but knives in belts sort of eliminate that.

If I were to have let my imagina0 tion run a little bit farther, I could have envisioned fleas in the beards and armpits of these guys and in just the armpits of their girlfriends. I believe I could even have envisioned the girls with beards if I'd tried. I'm doing it now. "Sleazy" is the word -- no, I think it was "scum" that came to mind . . . very judgmental of me, I know.

I think I discovered that absence does not always make the heart grow fonder and that, familiarity in this case, however minimal, does breed contempt.

Sorry, Margie. I hope you find a husband, but I'm never coming back to Jimmy's, and I'll worry about you, knowing you're there three or four nights a week. But I'd rather do my drinking with "phonies" and "guys with one thing on their minds."

*****

Laura Lauth

The Geese Make Lines In The Sunset Sky

The geese make lines in the sunset sky
in the wavering strung out way they fly
My heart longs to join their flight
To leap up and go -- to fly all night
Until I reach some warm island, or Mexico
with a shining red dawn. Damn! I'd go
in twenty seconds if I had the wings
To fly me -- and there were no strings
or reasonings to bind me home
To culture, propriety -- I can't go roam
The skies with geese. I'll stay
here and sigh, again. Someday.

*****

Judy Belfield

Poetry Pour le Bain

"C'mon in
the words are fine,"
they said with bathtub grins.
I watched her splash some sonnets
as he splattered out an epic verse.
They sprayed the room with anapests
and bawdy limericks too.
They sprinkled quatrains on the floor
until there was "poetry, poetry everywhere."
And I stood there
wishing I had the nerve
to get my feet wet.
"O can't,"
I said.
"Gotta get home
cause my meter reader's comin
and I haven't let him in for months."

*****

Jason Coleman

Perception

Time.
Incredible four digit word idea.
A millennium of segments pass in a flash,
as a moment approaches infinity yet
Never quite reaches its destination;
Ahead and beyond the void of length.

Time.
Expected to pierce the minds navigation.
Suggesting a course through uncharted realms;
Animal instincts lost in confusion, for
Splices of energy combine too late;
Different conditions never conform.

Time.
Electro-mechanical vibrating pulse.
Indicator with meaningless system of record
Advancing a theory of unrest repetition, when
Applied on call by man, and put aside when not;
Conforming to false manipulation.

Time.
Relative motion in four dimensions.
Beyond definition of set word progression;
Encompasses all that one could imagine as
an endless conveyor of insignificant present particles,
Waiting to be bundled into a composite past.

*****

Judy Belfield

Honky-Tonkin Rhythm

Honky-tonkin rhythm --
fast or slow,
here I go
movin with the music.
Pelvic syncopation,
swayin to the beat --
shoulder-shiftin,
torso-twistin --
here I go;
keep the flow a comin
all night, all right, all night long.
Piano clankin,
crankin out a tickled tempo --
grindin at the ivories in my spine.
I'm in the hands
of hypnotizin, tantalizin,
squeezeryerthighzin vibrations
that thrumble through my skin --
Do it again,
All right!
Here I go
all night long.

*****

Jason Coleman

Thwarted Writer

I make ewer of a tide -- it idea.
For reek over dams , drown I. Dud.
Alias sign I tail.
I'm , uh , frustrated art ;
Egad ! Evil !
So shore , vases , aver --
Oh ! S.O.S. !
Lived ages ; knit senile ; no trade.
Tart surf.
Humiliating is sail -- a dud in words.
Nad revoke.
Err of a edit I edit afore.
Week am I.

*****

J. D. Guse

Ignorance Is Bliss

Contrary to the title, as a young child living on the newly purchased farm of my parents, ignorance was not bliss. Moreover, it was downright frustrating! As a ten year old from Chicago I felt quite out of place in the country. Knowledge was power, so to speak, and it was easy to see which farmers were the most knowledgable by the successfulness of their farms. It was this very environment that I felt condemned to a life of perpetual ignorance, constantly chastising myself, believing that I would never learn.

My neighbor was Fred Doncek. In '71, when I met him, I had run the mile from my house to his in search of Fred's fresh eggs.

When I arrived I found Fred, faded overalls like towels on his thin body, standing before a magestic oak in his farm yard. Knife in hand, displaying baldness beneath a green John Deere hat positioned awkwardly above his left ear, Fred carved a vertical notch in

Ignorance Is Bliss (cont'd)

the bark, oh so carefully, avoiding the uniform notches he had evidently made at some time before. In one smoothly flowing action he closed his knife on his left leg, leaned his head back, and spit the excess juice from his chewing tobacco at the notch he had just made. I felt I was on the set for the making of the movie "The Life and Times of Grizzly Adams." I cautiously turned and looked apprehensively for a black bear.

"Yes, lad, wha' da ya need?"

Off guard, I stammered that I was the neighbor boy.

"Pleased ta meet ya." Came the reply.

"My mom said I could buy a dozen eggs here."

I waited patiently while Fred limped to the garage with the use of a gnarly home made cane. It was a minute or two before he returned, basket in hand, with the comment, "Well let's go see what we can find."

I turned and looked behind me, illustrating so effectively the classic

"Who me?" reply.

"C'mon." he blurted.

A certain urgency filled my thoughts. I found myself running to his side.

I smelled Fred's tobacco now as we walked past his rabbit cages toward the two chicken coops that had seen better days. A rooster strutted ever so elegantly in the presence of his well established haren of hens. Then, with one agile spin, he clawed the ground and repositioned his feathers at the sight of an intruder.

"Oh, go on." demanded Fred, and the rooster quickly gathered a few potential mates and scurried off to a corner of the fenced in area.

"Watch the ground, 'cause some-o-them hens lays 'em where they wants."

I accurately deciphered his comments lowering my head to watch my feet as I tripped head first over the threshold of the second coop. Catching myself on the far wall of the one room structure I heard Fred ask, "What happened?"

"I tripped." I said.

Fred turned to look, laughed and said, "Your mama won't know ya if ya come home smellin' like that."

I glanced down and my eyes revealed the dreadful sight of fecal material, from several types of chickens, mashed into the knees of my once blue jeans.

"Oh boy." I said, as the smell of manure filled my nostrils.

Fred laughed, again, yet he expressed sincerity in his comments. "T'resa's up at the house. You see if she can't do some'in' for ya. I get the rest-o-the eggs."

I walked, stiff legged, toward the door of the building keeping a close eye on that treacherous first step called the threshold.

As I robotly paced through the barnyard towards the gate, I heard, in the distance, a sound like chickens laughing along with the echo of Fred's bellowing voice.

"'Resa, do some'in' for this lad, he got a little dirty in here with th' chickens."

"O.K!" came the reply from the house.

Theresa appeared amidst the iris and the roses that decorated the entrance to her small house. Her glasses hung lazily off her nose. The curl of her white hair set nicely against her pale blue flowered dress as she came from the house to greet me. Bucket in hand, she produced a pair of old work pants.

"Here!" she said. "Try these on while I go get some water in this bucket."

Reluctantly, I removed my soiled jeans for a pair that were probably older than I was. I quickly drew the clean pants on over my lower torso without realizing I hadn't unfastened the snap.

Ignorance Is Bliss (cont'd)

I handed my jeans to Theresa who in turn placed them in the newly filled bucket.

"Come inside and you can call your mom and tell her what happened."

I walked inside to find a house so nostalgic with antiques that my mind toyed with the idea of how old the Doncek's really were.

"There's the phone." came her concerned voice.

With reservation I lifted the receiver and began to dial.

"How could I explain this one," I thought.

The phone rang; the connection was made. Before I knew it mom was laughing. I was depressed and Theresa saw that in my face as I struggled to keep my pants taut around my waist.

"Tell your mom you can have dinner here."

I relayed the offer and, to my amazement, my mother agreed.

As I returned the phone to the hook, I mulled over my present situation.

Here I was in a strange house with people I didn't even know. And I was in someone else's pants which, by the way, weren't at all comfortable. I suddenly recalled my parochial school days in Chicago. The police officer, Officer Friendly of all things, would enter the room and explain for half a day about the evils of strangers. My mind focused in on the words "STRANGER DANGER." My eyes searched the room I was in for security. I barely controlled my panic.

My mind clicked back to the present as Fred entered the house. Inside the basket he carried was an array of some two dozen eggs.

The door quickly closed behind Fred as he asked about my condition.

"Fine." I said.

"Get those eggs off the table Fred! We're havin' dinner soon."

I heard Fred mutter something. "Women ...." he trailed.

Before another word was said, dinner was on the table and the three of us were seated. The usual informational questions were asked. Dinner consisted of what looked like spaghetti and Butternut bread.

Being of authentic Italian descent, I quickly evaluated the dinner and determined that the hostess was <u>not</u> Italian. Thus, I asked the inevitable question. "What is this?"

I felt the surprised stare of Fred at my back as I sought the reply from Theresa.

"Spaghetti squash." Fred answered.

I decided not to mention anything about the meal and, as it happened, I didn't have to. Fred quickly explained the background of the spaghetti squash.

"It's just like pumpkins or melons." he said.

After dinner, Fred and I had a

chance to talk while Theresa dried my now faded jeans.

"My granddaddy had a farm outside Chicago. He watched the Chicago Fire off his back porch." Fred began as he filled his pipe and eased the piece into his mouth. "Said he could read 'is paper by the light. But he never said much 'bout it to me; granddad was always kind-o-quiet."

"Fred, I saw you cutting something in the tree out there--what was that for?" I asked.

"C'mon outside and 'll show ya."

Fred moved out of his chair and waited for me to adjust my borrowed pants.

We walked to the edge of the yard where Fred explained the reason for the added notch.

"Ever'time I catch a critter 'n' kill it, I make 'nother cut 'n that oak over there. Then I spit t'bacco juice on 'er so the tree don't go bad."

"Oh." I said, looking down once again to notice that the animal was a headless turtle of considerable size.

"I told my kids that when I die, I wan' 'em to cut that tree down. She's been here 's long 's I have." Fred was definite in his speech as he tugged another breath thru his burned out tobacco pipe.

"Your pants are done." Theresa hollered from the open window in the house.

I ran so fast to the door that I almost forgot that my hands were serving a much more meaningful purpose. I immediately clawed at the belt loops of the pants and thus saved myself from certain embarassment. I decided that walking was much less strenuous.

"The bathroom is by the sink there."

"Thanks." I said.

As I came from the bathroom, Fred had returned to the house and was placing the fresh eggs in old cartons.

"That'll be 'bout a buck," he said.

I reached in my pocket to retrieve the dollar I had put there earlier. The wet paper served to embarras me. I gingerly held out the crumpled mess.

Fred laughed, "Seems trouble just follows you around. Tell ya what," he said. "Next time ya come here bring 'n extra dollar and ya can pay for the eggs then."

"Thanks Mr. Doncek."

"Fred to you." he said reassuring me with a handshake.

I left the house and cautiously walked the long mile home.

Over the years, Fred filled my mind with some 90 years of his experiences. We became good friends, and I was invited many a time to the couple's house for dinner.

I regretted going away to college. I felt that Fred's knowledge was better than anything a school could ever offer me.

Last year, upon my return home for the Thanksgiving holiday, I passed Fred's house and stopped by.

I called for Fred in the barnyard, and thought they must be visiting their daughter's family since I heard no answer. I walked slowly past the house and down the driveway to my car. Something was different. Looking back once more, I saw the oak tree was gone.

*****

Kevin Jordan

Homo Ferox

Who, but Man, will train animals to kill,
blind goldfinches so they'll sing at His will?
Who boils lobsters till He hears them scream?
Who, but Man, could treat Men so mean?
Only Man is dreaded by every living thing,
Man, on a throne, calling Himself the King!

There is a blackbird singing in a tree.
Will it fall silent and fly away from me?
As I walk down the forest path, slow,
will the deer flash their tails and go?

A tiger, gone mad from toothache, will attack outright.
A cobra, hard-pressed, will in self-defense fight.
But not a beast, anywhere, will wantonly kill;
'cept for his family, to get a meal.
Man will go out, armed for His liesure,
and kill anything living, for His pleasure!

There is a rabbit, nibbling at grass low,
will it run, in terror, towards its safe hole?
As I walk by the riverside bank today,
why do the very fish dart suddenly away?

*****

Jason Coleman

Sherwood U.S.A.
(An Attempt at Song Writing)

Money is the root of all evil
And we ponder if it is legal
Tender as the buck may be
It's still hard cash to me

At the check-out counter the other day
Found out I didn't have enough to pay
So with cheap plastic card I stood in awe
Watching myself steal under the law

Bureaucratic control is gettin' me down
Federal Reserves the crummiest system around
As gold goes up, see the green back fall
Soon it's gonna be worth nothin' at all
nothin' at all

Chorus
Double menace attacking us now
Taxation;Inflation;Holy Cow
They steal from the rich and give to the poor
Don't want Robin Government no more

Trying to survive we make a mild living
Charities come around and expect us to be giving
From standard wage we pay bills for this and that
You'd make more money on the corner passing the hat

Currency's short so I'd think it'd be wiser
To buy a big box spring and become a miser
Where I would live would be anyone's guess
Far as possible from the I.R.S.
the I.R.S.

Chorus
Everybody knows...Everybody knows...
Everybody knows Robin Hood has got to go
Tell it on the mountain and by the sea
What SHERWOOD FOREST is supposed to be

Free enterprise system in ball and chain
And the pressure today is rockin' my brain
Moulah is everything to me you know
I only wish that I was rollin' in the dough

Rollin'...Rollin'...Rockin' and Rollin'
Chorus
There aint no place I'd rather be
But you gotta live in dignity

*****

WORDEATER XXXIII STAFF

Judy Belfield
Kristi Carston
Beth Hawkins
Dan Miner
Dave Moore
John Stobart

For this issue, to get a submission accepted, three of the above had to vote for acceptance. For the award winners, only John Stobart is responsible.

Present manuscripts or cover designs for Wordeater Number 34 must be submitted to John Stobart in room C 1069 by Dec. 18, 1980. Manuscripts will not be returned. They may be anonymous. They should be typed.

WORDEATER WINNERS

$25.00 Poetry Award:

JUDY BELFIELD

$25.00 Prose Award shared by:

VAL BREUCH

BRAD HAYES

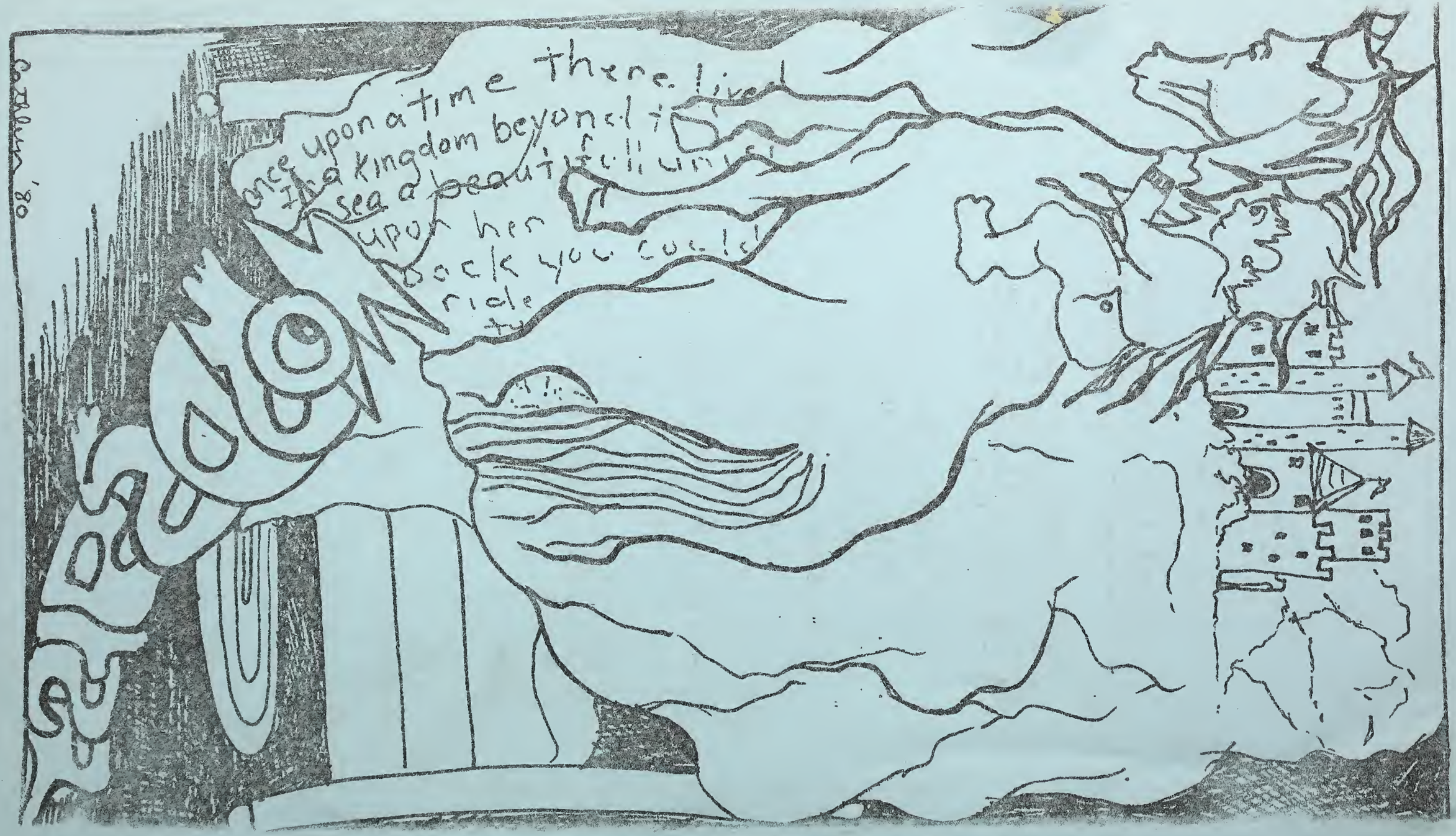
For Cover Designs (front and back) $20.00 to:

CATHLEEEN ALBERT

LOUDMOUTH McKRACKEN SO DECRIES! via J. Stobart, his representative. The preceeding awards are for Wordeater 33, this volume. Similar awards will be granted for future issues.

DEADLINE: WORDEATER 34 - Dec. 18, 1980
35 - March 6, 1981
36 - May 8, 1981

Thanks to all who helped collate.


once upon a time there lived
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